THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War **50¢**

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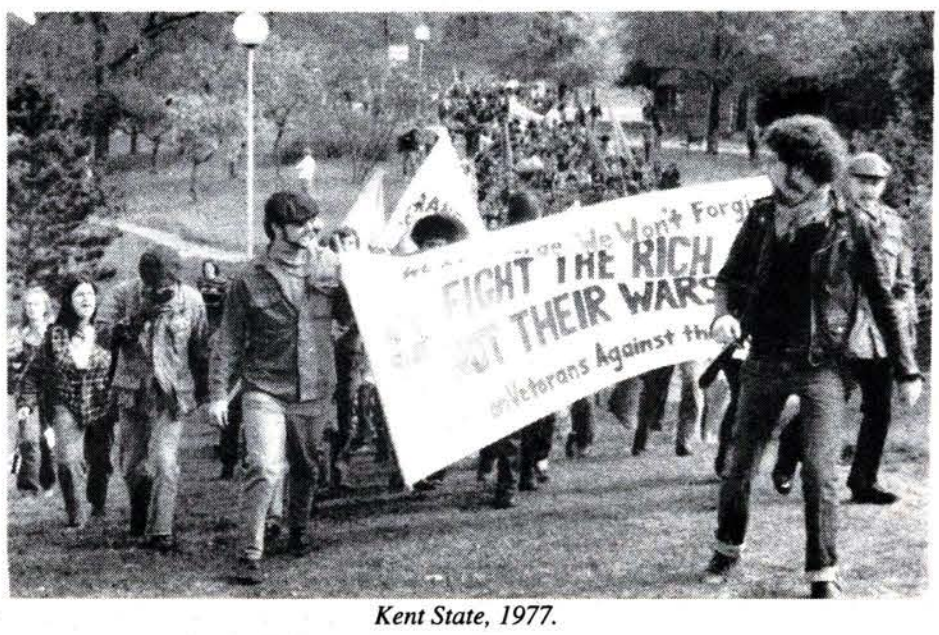
Tin Soldiers and Nixon's Army: Murder At Kent State

Bill Davis

"As the Ohio law says, use any force that's necessary, even to the point of shooting. We don't want to get into that, but the law says we can if necessary."

- Major General Sylvester Del Corso at a press conference, May 3, 1970

On April 30, 1970, Richard Nixon doubled back on his promise to end the war in Vietnam by expanding the visible conflict and invading Cambodia, a neutral country. The American people, visibly tired of the ongoing conflict, reacted against the expansion of the war. Still unaware of the massive secret bombings of Laos and Cambodia, the anti-war movement reacted strongly to this new expansion. College campuses across the country were at the forefront of these actions.



Kent State, 1977.

The political mood in Ohio and the events leading up to Kent State mirrored those of the nation. Labor unrest, civil rights struggles, and anti-war activities simmered and then boiled over in the spring of 1970.

In Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Columbus, the African-American communities fought for recognition, and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters called a statewide strike against the trucking industry, then went on to brutally punish the Ohio National Guard for interceding on behalf of trucking concerns. In Columbus, Ohio State University, on the day of its one hundredth anniversary, was plunged into two weeks of violent street fighting when Ohio State police and Columbus city police attacked a peaceful demonstration at the gates of the university. The students were asking for black studies programs and an end to the war. Before the university was closed for the balance of the spring term, hundreds of students and community residents were wounded and injured in the fighting that raged before and after the events at Kent State. Before the second week in May, every major college or university in Ohio was closed and occupied by police and National Guard forces.

By late April, Kent, Ohio, a small college town in northern Ohio, had begun to stir politically. With many students gone for the

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Chicago's Veterans Day: SOA, Torture, Political Prisoners, Veterans' Health Care

Joe Miller

11-11-11. Once again we gathered to remind everyone of the true costs of war. The weather was milder than usual, though the late fall version of the "Hawk" was whipping around pretty well on the corner of Wacker and Wabash.

There seemed to be more media representatives than attendees, but soon more VVAW members and friends, as well as other onlookers (including one active duty Army sergeant) showed up, and we began what seemed to be the only Veterans Day ceremony taking place in the city of Chicago that day. For the second year in a row, the Mayor's Office was sending every call in our direction, and the National Office received some 25 calls from media and other interested folks in the days leading up to this event.

Bill Davis at Chicago VVAW's Veterans Day event.

Bill Davis, former national coordinator of VVAW and Air Force veteran, opened the event as master of ceremonies by reminding everyone what VVAW continues to do after more than thirty years of struggles. We fight to make good on the promises that successive U.S. administrations have made to successive generations of U.S. veterans. We won't allow the government to fight wars "on the cheap" by ignoring the health and other needs of veterans. Bill announced that this day's event was dedicated to the memory of Sergeant First Class Edward Carter, who was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously in 1997 for extraordinary heroism during World War II. Carter, who

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VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR

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From the National Office

Joe Miller

Dear Friends and Comrades,

Welcome to the Fall/Winter 1999 issue of ***The Veteran***! This has been another busy and fruitful period for the activists and supporters of Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

VVAW members from the National Office and the active chapters in Chicago, Champaign-Urbana, and Milwaukee participated in the annual two-day Summer Homeless Standdown in Chicago. Many also came out to work the one-day Winter Standdown in November. Both events included help from large numbers of young people from high school and college.

The Chicago Chapter meets on a regular basis and has sent people into local high schools and colleges to talk about the Vietnam War and the realities of military life. Chicago VVAW has also continued to host regular Memorial Day and Veterans Day events, which have drawn more and more media attention in recent years.

The Champaign-Urbana Chapter meets on a regular basis and continues to function as the base for production of The ***Veteran***, the maintenance of the VVAW membership database, and hosting of VVAW's web page and e-mail lists. Members there also continue their regular work with anti-racism efforts on the University of Illinois campus and in the larger community.

The Milwaukee Chapter, following the Memorial Day events, worked at the Locust Street Days Festival in that community. Members also participated in protests against the bombing in Serbia. The chapter also sent folks to Chicago to help in the standdown.

The Clarence Fitch Chapter in New York/New Jersey has reactivated itself with regular chapter meetings that began in April, and it looks to be more visible in the area.

The most recent National Steering Committee Meeting in October decided to revamp VVAW's structure to better reflect our current reality and to precipitate organizing and action. VVAW has had regional coordinators as part of its organizational structure for a while, but it was agreed that they don't reflect the current true nature of the organization. It was decided to establish a list of local contacts to replace the regional coordinators.

Therefore, we are making a call for local contacts from among active, dues-paying VVAW members. If you are interested in being listed as such a contact, please send your name and complete contact information to the National Office post office box in Chicago. The National Office will make the final determination of this contact list and it will appear in future issues of The Veteran as well as on our web page.

We expect more and more speaking engagements around teaching the Vietnam War. We need more people to be actively involved, to speak to the press and to other vets. Our struggle of more than thirty years is still not over, and we need to be able to reach out as broadly as possible. Step up and join us in these continuing struggles. We look forward to hearing from as many of you across the country as possible.

Joe Miller is a national coordinator of VVAW and a member of VVAW's Champaign-Urbana Chapter.

Where We Came From, Who We Are, Who Can Join

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc. (VVAW) is a national veterans' organization that was founded in New York City in 1967 after six Vietnam vets marched together in a peace demonstration. It was organized to voice the growing opposition among returning servicemen and women to the still-raging war in Indochina, and grew rapidly to a membership of over 30,000 throughout the United States as well as active duty GIs stationed in Vietnam. Through ongoing actions and grassroots organization, VVAW exposed the ugly truth about US involvement in Southeast Asia and our first-hand experiences helped many other Americans to see the unjust nature of that war.

VVAW quickly took up the struggle for the rights and needs of veterans. In 1970, we started the first rap groups to deal with traumatic after-effects of war, setting the example for readjustment counselling at Vet Centers now. We exposed the shameful neglect of many disabled vets in VA Hospitals and helped draft legislation to improve educational benefits and create job programs. VVAW fought for amnesty for war resisters, including vets with bad discharges. We helped make known the negative health effects of exposure to chemical defoliants and the VA's attempts to cover-up these conditions as well as their continued refusal to provide treatment and compensation for many Agent Orange Victims.

Today our government is still financing and arming undemocratic and repressive regimes around the world. Recently, American troops have been sent into combat in the Middle East and Central America, for many of the same misguided reasons that were used to send us to Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, many veterans are still denied justice - facing unemployment, discrimination, homelessness, post-traumatic stress disorder and other health problems, while already inadequate services are being cut back or eliminated.

We believe that service to our country and communities did not end when we were discharged. We remain committed to the struggle for peace and for social and economic justice for all people. We will continue to oppose senseless military adventures and to teach the real lessons of the Vietnam War. We will do all we can to prevent another generation from being put through a similar tragedy and we will continue to demand dignity and respect for veterans of all eras. This is real patriotism and we remain true to our mission. JOIN US!

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Submission Guidelines for *The Veteran*

- We prefer to recieve articles via e-mail, but will also take mailed diskettes (3 1/4", ASCII files, PC or Mac) and paper (least preferable).
- To submit your article for possible inclusion in the next issue, email <vvaw@prairienet.org> with "Attn: Veteran Editor" in the subject line or mail to:

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Notes From the Boonies

PAUL WISOVATY

This past spring, I was re-invited to speak to five Douglas County high school history classes about the Vietnam War. In most respects, those experiences didn't turn out to be a whole lot different from the ones I'd had in the spring of 1998, my first attempt at the "'Nam re-education" of our local youth. For that reason, I had declined Joe's and Jeff's gracious invitation to write an article for the last ***Veteran*** about that endeavor.

But then, as I reflected upon round two of my efforts as a sort of volunteer teacher's aide, I remembered one question that a student at one of the high schools had asked. Either I had kind of buried that query in my subconscious, or, more likely, being fifty-three years old I just plain forgot about it — and especially about the students' reaction to my answer. I began to think that there might be something in that experience worth writing about.

The question, loosely paraphrased but substantially accurate, was this: "My grandfather says your Sixties generation was useless as tits on a boar hog. You smoked, snorted or swallowed anything you could get your hands on, went to bed with any animal life form you stumbled upon coming out of a bar, pissed off all the money your hard-working parents worked a lifetime to save for you, and now — thirty years later — here you are standing up in front of my class trying to tell us you were all George Washington or something. How goddamned dumb do you think we are?"

Well, she didn't really say all of those things, I suspect because her parents had taught her to respect her elders. But, truth to tell, that's pretty much what she had on her mind. (Trust me, I was there. It wasn't pretty.)

My first reaction was to take a cue from Dick Nixon and say, "I'm glad you asked that question." To my credit, I didn't do that. Instead, I put on my best Dan Quayle face (always an attention-getter), and, after a few agonizing seconds, put together what I hoped was a halfway decent answer to a very good question.

My Sixties Generation. What was I supposed to come up with? A justification? An apology? An old Kingston Trio song? Hell, who died and made me Jimi Hendrix?

Anyway, to the best of my honest recollection, this is how I answered that question.

We sure weren't perfect. I know a guy who took one acid trip too many, and since 1971 he's been sitting out on his parents' front porch rocking chair, studying the back of his hands and just smiling. He's been doing that for twenty-eight years. On the other side of the coin, I knew a lot of men and women that I marched with in the anti-war days, who went on to law school and are now making a hell of a lot of money representing HMOs or, worse yet, selling life insurance. And I know too many of my peers, including a lot of 'Nam vets, who still think that we should've elected Curtis LeMay or George Wallace as president. Missing perfection I can live with, but we weren't even consistent about it.

What was I supposed to come up with? A justification? An apology? An old Kingston Trio song? Hell, who died and made me Jimi Hendrix?

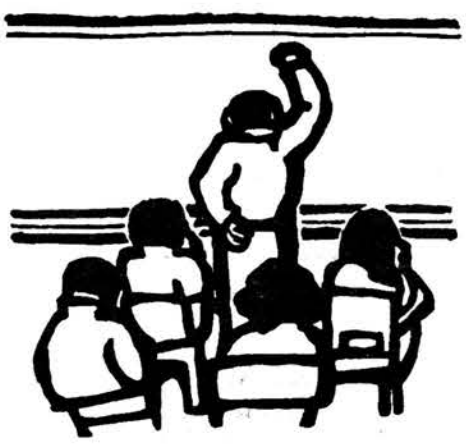
But you know what? Most of us tried. Your grandparents' generation told us to support the troops in Vietnam, and we did. We brought them home. They told our African-American brothers and sisters that they'd eventually get them up to the front of the bus, but they shouldn't be in a big hurry about it, because those things take time. Our generation didn't feel like waiting that long. And no cause for you young ladies in the audience to have worried, either. Your grandparents' Rotary Club had all kinds of nurses' scholarships for you. Of course, they had a lot more dollars tucked away for medical school tuition, but that was for your fathers, not your mothers. And you young folks worrying about your sexual orientation? Well — and you don't have to raise your hands or anything on this one — you can pretty well guess what Grandpa and Grandma would tell you about that.

I didn't tape that particular presentation, so I can't say that everything I just wrote is a verbatim re-creation of it. But it's pretty close. And then it got a little spooky, because when I got done with that freewheeling monologue, not one student asked another question. Not one. I had just got through telling them, not real subtly, that most of what their grandparents had been telling them was bullshit. I had strongly suggested that Tom Brokaw's "greatest generation" had been the biggest single impediment in this century to the admission of minorities, women and gays into full citizenship in our great melting pot. I had told them that, our indefensible invasion of a foreign country notwithstanding, it was their grandparents who had ultimately dishonored this country by trying to whitewash it. And not one student had a single thing to say about any of that.

I have decided that there are three possible explanations for this. One is that I had done just an ass-kicking job of portraying my generation in a fresh and positive light. The second is that they didn't feel like listening to any more of what sounded like a lot of self-serving crap. And the third, I'm afraid, is that nothing I had just rambled on about for fifteen minutes was anything they were the least bit interested in.

If there is a moral to this story, it may be something like this. For any of you folks thinking about "teaching Vietnam" in this country's high schools, I would certainly encourage you to do that. But keep one thing in mind. You are there as the guest speaker. No one is going to be really rude to you, and none of the students is going to stand up, tell you you're full of shit and just walk out. And, if you're lucky, and the students have been prepped a little bit, they may even give you a little applause as you leave. But unless you have done an awfully better job than I've ever done, or unless you're one hell of a mind reader, you will probably walk out of that classroom with one nagging question on your mind. That question is, "Did I really accomplish anything here?"

Two years, eleven classes and a couple of hundred high school students later, the best I can come up with is, "I'd like to think so." Apparently I'm not convinced that it's an entirely useless endeavor, or I wouldn't be planning to do it again next year.



PAUL WISOVATY IS A MEMBER OF VVAW'S C-U CHAPTER. HE LIVES IN TUSCOLA, IL WHERE HE WORKS FOR THE PROBATION DEPARTMENT. HE WAS IN VIETNAM WITH THE US ARMY 9TH DIVISION IN 1968.

Fort Benning Vigil To Close The SOA

JOHN POOLE

Spending two weeks in the latter half of July with Charlie Liteky (Medal of Honor recipient for heroism in Vietnam) turned out to be just what I needed to do, and just when I needed to do it. I had recently finished an intense, nine-year job working on a variety of social justice issues with a goal of systemic change. I needed to focus only on one dimension of that work for a consistent period of time. I also needed to share the experience with someone who felt passion for the work, as well as having background experiences in common. We had frequent visits with Roy Bourgeois, the Vietnam veteran who founded the School of the Americas Watch ten years ago. Charlie, Roy and I share a passion for Central America, having fasted to draw a focus to the region, as well as lobbying, conducting vigils, and protesting over the years. And we are Vietnam veterans. We had focused conversations on issues of social justice during most of the time we were together, but there were times when we just hung out, had a drink, and watched a movie. It felt comfortable to reminisce a bit and share stories.

Charlie has been conducting an ongoing vigil at Fort Benning for most of the past twelve months. Our Monday-through-Friday routine consisted of two hours of vigil in the morning, and two hours in the afternoon at the south gate. During each two-hour vigil we worked on laying out the panels and then putting each letter in place toward the construction of a Latin American Memorial Wall. The wall commemorates some of the victims of some of the atrocities perpetrated, in large part, by graduates of the U.S. Army's School of the Americas (SOA). Information on a panel includes the name of the country, the atrocity, the date it occurred, how many SOA graduates were involved, and the names of some of the victims. Occasionally, photos are included as well.

Charlie, Roy and I worked on painting small strips of wood and assembling them into 1,000 crosses, on which names of victims will be printed, for the solemn funeral procession that has become the mainstay of the annual November vigil and protest at Fort Benning. The event is scheduled on or close to the anniversary of the massacre of six Jesuit priests, a mother, and her daughter in San Salvador, El Salvador. This year's vigil and protest from November 19-21 will commemorate the tenth anniversary of the atrocity, which occurred November 16, 1989.

The last night of the visit couldn't have turned out better. Charlie and I had tuned into C-Span to watch a debate in the House of Representatives featuring an amendment to the Foreign Appropriations Bill, proposed by Joe Moakley of Massachusetts, to close the School of the Americas. The team of representatives who spoke in favor of the closing of the School developed a momentum that seemed promising. Then, in the late hours of the evening, came the vote: 230-197 in favor of closing the SOA It felt dreamlike. This could mean cutting off $2 million of "scholarship money" for flying Latin American military personnel to and from Fort Benning. My last vigil on the following morning was a celebratory one. When Roy came by to visit us, Charlie shared poignantly that the vote had occurred on the tenth anniversary of the day on which he returned his Medal of Honor in protest of the U.S. government's policy toward the countries and people of Central America.

When I boarded the plane to return to Chicago, I felt a sense of accomplishment. I'm still enjoying the impact of the experience.

JOHN POOLE HAS BEEN PART OF THE EFFORT TO CLOSE THE SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS FOR EIGHT YEARS. HE IS A MEMBER OF VVAW'S CHICAGO CHAPTER.

CAUTION: Military Service May Be Hazardous To Your Health!

JOE MILLER

"Doctor, Mr. M.D., can you tell me what is wrong with me?"

BANG! You're dead — or you lost a limb, an eye, your genitals. You may end up in a wheelchair for the rest of your life, a visible (and probably unwelcome) reminder to your fellow citizens of the costs of war and military service.

What of those hidden hazards, those invisible "wounds"? Agent Orange, PTSD, then Gulf War Syndrome, and now the fears regarding the anthrax vaccine.... What about those health problems that don't show up in your exit physical, things that show up fifteen or twenty years later? What about the recent news that 8 to 10 percent of veterans treated at Veterans Affairs medical centers have hepatitis C — an infection rate some five times higher than the general population? Another news item in ***The New York Times***, ***"Doctor's Quest Stirs Medical Debate"*** (September 19, 1999) provoked me to consider the possible source of my own long-term health problems.

February, 1968. I was honorably discharged from the U.S. Navy after six years and ten months of active duty, and my exit physical showed no problems.

In 1974, six years after my discharge from the Navy and eight years after my transfer from carrier duty, a spot was discovered on my lung.

In 1979, my eyes began to act up and by 1981, at the age of 39, I was developing cataracts in both eyes. Where did this come from?

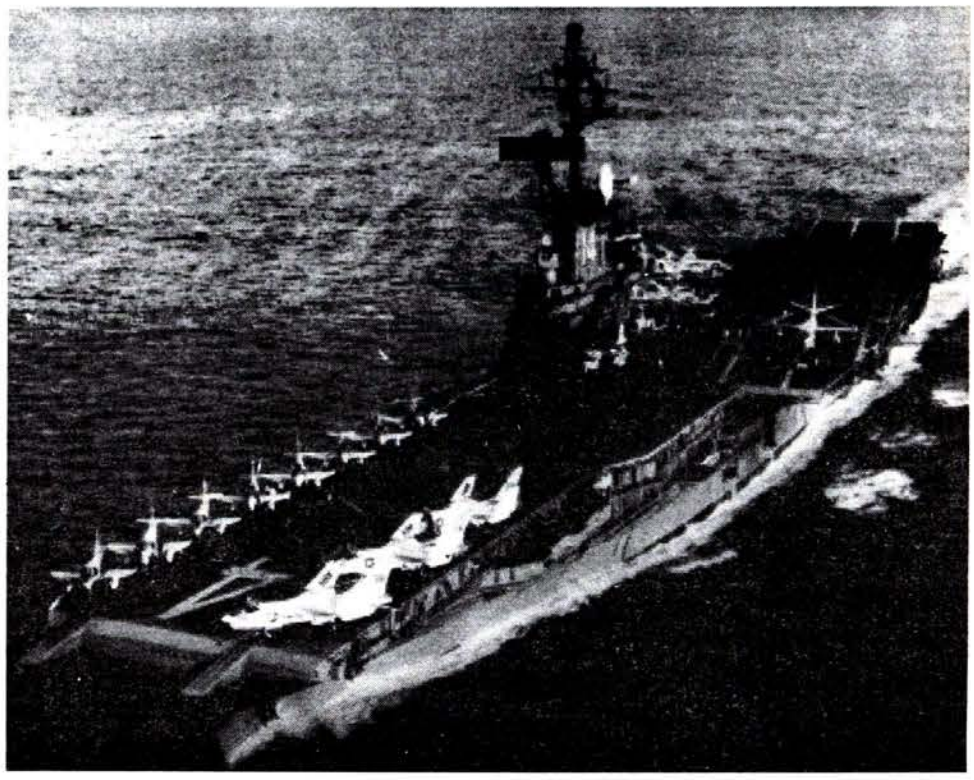
I served in the U.S. Navy from 1961 to 1968, with a tour aboard the USS Ticonderoga (CVA-14), an attack aircraft carrier of World War II vintage, from June 1964 to February 1966.

In Summer 1972, my family and I moved to Champaign-Urbana where I began graduate studies at the University of Illinois. During a physical exam at the student health center in 1974, a spot was discovered on my lung. The center had me back for regular x-rays over the next couple of years, but there was no change in the spot, so they discontinued the x-rays. I never felt any ill effects that could be connected to that spot, so it was just forgotten.

In 1979, my family and I moved to Australia, where I took up a temporary lectureship in politics at the University of Melbourne. During this time I began to experience serious eye problems, redness, irritation, pain, and fuzzy vision. I went to a couple of doctors to have them check this, but nothing was determined. Perhaps it was just eye strain, a work hazard for academics. I was given eye drops and sent away. The problem persisted and grew worse.

Finally, in 1982, my vision in the left eye was seriously limited. I went to a physician at the Royal Melbourne Hospital near the university, and he gave me a complete physical exam, including lung capacity tests, stress tests, blood work-ups, and so on. Finally, he told me he thought I had sarcoidosis, something I had never heard of. This ailment normally attacks lung tissue, but it was known to attack other organs, including the eyes. I had secondary glaucoma (at age 40) as a result of this sarcoid condition. What we didn't know was where I might have contracted this illness.

When I returned to the States in 1983, I began further treatment at the eye clinic at the University of Illinois in Chicago. The ophthalmologist accepted the sarcoidosis diagnosis and treated my eye problems as a direct result of that condition. In 1986, I had cataract surgery in my left eye. I later had cataract surgery in my right eye as well. The secondary glaucoma is still there, and I'll be taking medication to control its effects for the rest of my life.



What of those hidden hazards, those invisible "wounds"? Agent Orange, PTSD, then Gulf War Syndrome, and now the fears regarding the anthrax vaccine.... What about those health problems that don't show up in your exit physical, things that show up fifteen or twenty years later?

I have never gone to a VA facility for this, since I never connected the condition to my service. Now it seems that all this might be connected with the two years of duty aboard that "ancient" aircraft carrier.

According to the ***Times*** story mentioned above, "Dr. [Philip] Jajosky pored over the files of nearly 1,200 Navy veterans in whom sarcoidosis was diagnosed between 1965 and 1993 and noticed the connection with those serving on aircraft carriers." This seemed to be connected with the task of "grinding anti-skid adhesive off the decks of the aircraft carriers." Dr. Jajosky believes that many of these men may have been misdiagnosed with sarcoidosis, since other physicians diagnosed silicosis, "a fatal job-related illness caused by airborne silica." There is no clear answer here.

While my work on the carrier did not involve such tasks as deck grinding, the enclosed spaces on that old ship certainly carried much particulate matter in the air, not to mention the constant presence of avgas fumes.

We were in dry-dock for six months in early 1965 for a major overhaul, which included deck refurbishment. Ship's work went on as usual, whether you worked in an office as I did or in the deck divisions. We all walked through clouds of dust day after day. Who knows what we may have been breathing in during that period?

Is this military service the cause of my health problems? Who can say after more than thirty years?

I want to hammer home a very important point. Those of us who speak to young people in schools about the Vietnam War and about the military have an added responsibility to talk about the possible long-term and hidden health hazards that may come from such service. Can they really depend upon the Department of Veterans Affairs for medical treatment if there is no clear connection with their military service?

These are some of the hidden social costs of war and military service. When the bill comes due at the expense of your health, who is going to pay?

JOE MILLER IS A NATIONAL COORDINATOR OF VVAW AND A MEMBER OF VVAW'S CHAMPAIGN-URBANA CHAPTER.

Rockford Veterans Day Commemoration

STANLEY CAMPBELL

Rockford Peace & Justice commemorated veterans on all sides of war and honored peace activists who have been arrested on Thursday, November 11, 1999, at Beattie Park in Rockford, Illinois. Members of Rockford Peace & Justice gathered for a short service, some readings and songs. There was a small turnout of approximately 25 people, but representatives from World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf war and even the Balkans were represented.

Special guest speaker was Ruthy Woodring, a member of the Catholic Worker community in Chicago. She talked about her arrests at Ft. Benning, Georgia, protesting the School of the Americas (SOA), which trains Latin American soldiers in interrogation and subterfuge.

In 1994 and 1995, Ms. Woodring went to Washington, D.C. to lobby against the SOA. In 1996, she "crossed the line" and trespassed on Ft. Benning at the annual anti-SOA demonstration. In 1997, she crossed the line again and was sentenced to six months in federal prison in Lexington, Kentucky. In 1998, she crossed again along with over 2,000 other protesters. All demonstrators were released.

She is planning on crossing the line again at the now-annual demonstration in front of Ft. Benning in November. Ms. Woodring was joined by six Rockfordians, including Jon McGinty, representative from the Unitarian Universalist Church; medical student Monique d'Avis, and myself. Also present were three students from Auburn High School who will attend the anti-SOA demonstration. Ms. Woodring stated, "Someone has to stand up to this cycle of violence, and as a U.S. citizen, I am proud that I can." Besides taking courses at the University of Illinois at Chicago, she is a part-time carpenter.

STANLEY CAMPBELL IS A LONG-TIME PEACE ACTIVIST AND A MEMBER OF VVAW SINCE 1971. HE IS THE DIRECTOR OF ROCKFORD URBAN MINISTRIES AND "THE ONLY PAID ACTIVIST IN ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS."

Chicago's Veterans Day

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fought in the Spanish Civil War with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, was secretly investigated as a suspected communist and denied re-enlistment in 1949 during the postwar red scare. *(See story on page 8.)*

Bill then introduced John Poole, Vietnam veteran and member of VVAW's Chicago Chapter, who spoke on the continuing struggle to close the School of the Americas (SOA). After a quick review of the history of SOA Watch over the past ten years, John reminded everyone of the upcoming vigil outside the gates of Fort Benning in Georgia, where the school is located. The organizers of this event expect 15-20,000 people to participate during the weekend of November 19-21, with perhaps 5,000 to "cross the line" and risk arrest, according to John. He also pointed out how important Illinois has become to this effort, that folks from this state have become the organizing model for this struggle. He then raised his fist and led the crowd in a chant of "Close the SOA! Close the SOA!"

The next speaker was Dr. Orlando Tizon, social justice activist and also a member of Chicago's VVAW Chapter. Dr. Tizon discussed his arrest, torture and imprisonment (for four years) under the Marcos regime in 1982, and he connected these experiences to the SOA issue by pointing out that one of his torturers bragged about his training at a "military school in the southern United States." Dr. Tizon then spoke of the efforts of the Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Committee (TASSC) to pressure the United States and the United Nations to finally abolish the use of torture in the world. *(See story and statement on page 7.)*

Bill Davis then returned to the podium to read a statement from the Leonard Peltier Defense Committee (LPDC) concerning the case of Leonard Peltier, American Indian Movement activist, who has been a political prisoner in the United States since 1977. The LPDC calls for Peltier's immediate release in light of the questionable nature of his original conviction, his increasingly poor health, and the recent actions taken to release a number of Puerto Rican Independence Movement activists. Bill asked everyone there to contact Congress and express support for the immediate release of this political prisoner.

I was the final speaker for this Veterans Day, and I focused upon my own possible service-connected health problem to help illuminate the issue of veterans' health care, or lack thereof. *(See article on page 5.)* Besides death or maiming, other often hidden hazards may await anyone who enlists in the military. We know about Agent Orange, PTSD, and Gulf War illness, all things that happened to people while in the service, things that took time to show up, usually long after the exit physical. We have also learned that hepatitis C is one of those long-hidden problems for Vietnam veterans. I asked the crowd, can we as veterans trust the government or its Department of Veterans Affairs to respond effectively to such situations now or in the future? History tells us this is at least questionable, given political pressures toward cost-cutting. We need to tell young people who are considering military service just how wide the range of possible health hazards may be for them.

Bill then closed the event by asking everyone to lower their heads for a moment of silence in remembrance of those who have fallen in service, those who are victims of U.S. foreign policies, and those veterans who are living but forgotten in their homelessness and pain.

JOE MILLER IS A NATIONAL COORDINATOR OF VVAW AND A MEMBER OF VVAW'S CHAMPAIGN-URBANA CHAPTER.

Victim of Torture Speaks

DR. ORLANDO TIZON

I am a survivor of torture. I was arrested with four others on September 20, 1982, in Davao City, in the southern island of Mindanao, Philippines. I was kept incommunicado for three weeks in Camp Catitipan of the Philippine Constabulary in the outskirts of the city. I was kept blindfolded and under constant interrogation, drugged, subjected to beatings and all kinds of threats, including mock executions.

Only after three weeks were the five of us allowed to talk to each other. One of the women arrested with us told us that she had been raped by soldiers using instruments dipped in hot pepper. We were finally allowed to receive visitors and talk to our lawyers. After three months, the five of us were transferred to the detention center in the city. While there, I saw prisoners interrogated at any time of the day or night; several were taken from detention never to come back.

On April of the following year, I was interrogated again. They attempted to extract information from me for two weeks. Once, two men in civilian clothes questioned me, and one of them, trying to use a friendly approach, told me that he had gone to military school in a camp in the southern United States. He bragged that he could sing U.S. country folk music better than some Americans.

I was released from prison after President Marcos was thrown out of power in 1986.

I add my voice to the voices of other survivors of torture calling that the practice of torture be outlawed once and for all throughout the world.

DR. ORLANDO "DONG" TIZON IS A FILIPINO ACTIVIST AND MEMBER OF THE CHICAGO CHAPTER OF VVAW.

Statement By The Survivors Of Torture To The President Of The United States And To Members Of TheNational Security Council

TORTURE ABOLITION AND SURVIVORS SUPPORT COMMITTEE (TASSC)

June 25,1999

The United Nations has declared June 26 as the International Day in Support of Torture Victims and Survivors. We who are international survivors of torture have gathered in Washington, D.C. to commemorate this day and wish to make the following statement:

There is no justifiable use of torture. Torture is absolutely prohibited under international law and is a crime against humanity. Torture is an attack to the very core of human dignity and is designed to destroy individual personalities and trust in humanity. We are survivors not only because we lived through serious physical and/or psychological infliction of pain but, above all because we have kept our dignity as individuals intact. Still, we bear in our minds, our bodies and our souls the destructive effects of this practice. Our struggle for survival has extended to our present lives. Many of us have been uprooted, becoming refugees; some of us feel like strangers and exiles in our homelands. We personally testify to the devastating effects of torture on our families and communities.

As U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan stated in the Diplomatic Conference to establish an International Criminal Court, very often states have been behind the most heinous atrocities known in our world. As survivors of the horrors of torture, we know that states plan, train, and perpetrate acts, often terrorism, and in many cases act in complicity with multinational corporations. Yet, states deny committing these acts of state terrorism.

Torture has become an endemic, systematic, and sophisticated tool of state repression in the very century where human rights treaties have condemned it as a crime. Ten years ago 80 counties were engaged in the practice of torture. Last year, according to Amnesty International, more than 117 countries used torture to control and "discipline" their population. Not only dictatorships engage in this practice. A contemporary feature is that democratically elected governments may also engage in systematic torture. We recognize that national security is a legitimate interest of any government. However, it has become the practice of many governments to place national security interests above respect for human rights and human life.

As an example, the United States has supported the assumption of power by dictators such as Somoza, Marcos, Pinochet and Fujimori. It has also supported regimes that, although democratic in appearance, are indeed responsible for crimes against humanity. The classification of government policies that affect human rights creates a climate in which these crimes can be committed with impunity and such secrecy violates basic democratic principles.

We therefore urge the United States government to take the following actions:

1. We insist that President Clinton issue a public proclamation renewing the United States government's commitment to eradicate the practice of torture in the world.

2. We urge President Clinton and members of Congress to stop supporting regimes engaged in torture and to align its foreign policy with its obligations under international human rights law.

3. We call on President Clinton and members of Congress to declassify all documents related to human rights abuses.

4. We urge the President and members of Congress to ensure protection for all people already in the United States or those seeking asylum in the United States who are at risk of torture in their home countries, in accordance with Article 3 of the Convention Against Torture.

5. We also call on the government to ensure that no person who has committed human rights atrocities is permitted to enter the United States. As a signatory to the Convention Against Torture, the United States must prosecute anyone who has committed such crimes and who is under its jurisdiction.

We believe that, as the world's most powerful nation, both politically and economically, the United States has a particular responsibility to eradicate this barbaric practice through diplomatic pressures and partnerships with other countries.

Army Apologizes To World War II Vet

ROBERT BURNS

WASHINGTON, Nov 10 (AP)

Nearly three years after President Clinton righted a wrong by awarding the Medal of Honor to the late Edward A. Carter Jr. for World War II heroics, the Army is officially acknowledging that it inflicted more injustices on Carter than even the president knew.

In a ceremony today in the Pentagon's historic Hall of Heroes, the Army was apologizing to Carter's family for having secretly investigated him as a suspected communist and barred him from re-enlisting in September 1949. The Army has determined the charges of disloyalty had no basis in fact.

The damage done to Carter was brought to light last spring by ***U.S. News & World Report***, which chronicled a long struggle by Allene Carter, the wife of Carter's eldest son, Edward Carter III, to uncover the truth about her father-in-law, restore his good name and force the Army to admit its mistake.

"It's an end to that dark cloud that has been hanging over the family for about 50 years now," Mrs. Carter said in an interview Tuesday. "It's actually a vindication. It means more to the family" than the Medal of Honor award.

Last August, Clinton wrote to Carter's widow, Mildred, to apologize for the Army's actions.

"Had I known this when I presented his Medal of Honor two years ago, I would have personally apologized to you and your family," Clinton wrote, referring to the White House ceremony in January 1997. "It was truly our loss that he was denied the opportunity to continue to serve in uniform the nation he so dearly loved."

Carter died in Los Angeles in 1963 at age 47.

Today's ceremony at the Pentagon marks an official admission by the Army that it erred. The Army Board for Correction of Military Records has corrected all of Carter's military records, and his family is being presented with three posthumous awards for Carter's conduct and service in Germany during World War II.

Last spring Allene Carter received 57 pages of Army documents declassified in response to her Freedom of Information Act requests. The counterintelligence records showed the Army opened a file on Carter in 1942, just months after he had first enlisted. His commanders in every unit he served in filed secret reports on him, including such details as the publications he read and clubs he joined.

In an announcement of today's ceremony, the Army called the investigation of Carter an "injustice from a time when an anxious nation saw the communist philosophy as a threat to America's democratic values." Mrs. Carter said she believes it was based more on racism than anti-communism.

The trigger for the Army's suspicions about Carter apparently was his record of having fought for the socialists in the Spanish Civil War against Gen. Francisco Franco's fascists. The son of a traveling missionary who had settled his family in Shanghai, Carter ran away from home and eventually found his way to Europe where he became a member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, an American volunteer unit that fought against the fascists before being forced to flee into France in 1938.

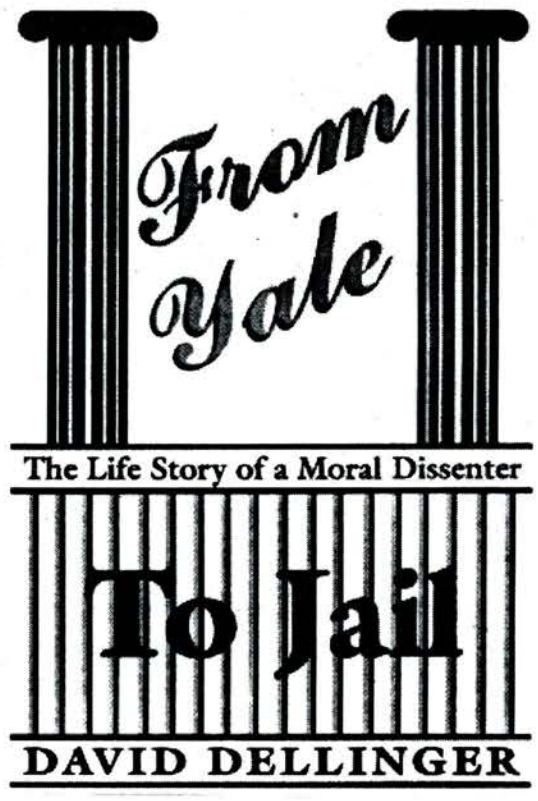
In 1940, Carter came to America and a year later he enlisted in the Army. On March 23, 1945, 11 days after arriving on the European front, he found himself on the march with a 12th Armored Division tank battalion near Speyer, Germany, when the tank he was riding sustained heavy fire. In leading a three-man patrol across an open field, two were killed and Carter was wounded five times.

An eight-man German patrol approached the blood-soaked Carter, thinking he was dead. He opened fire with a .45-caliber submachine gun, killing six and capturing the two others. Using the two as human shields, he returned to his company. His prisoners provided valuable information on German troop movements.

At the Jan. 13, 1997, White House ceremony, Clinton presented Medals of Honor for seven black World War II veterans, only one of whom was still alive. Carter and the six others became the first black soldiers of that war to receive the nation's highest honor for heroism in combat. The next day Carter was reburied with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery. He had been buried at a military cemetery in Westwood, California.

"A powerful, sensitive, and deeply compassionate reflection from one of the most important and bravest nonviolent revolutionaries of the twentieth century."
— Martin Sheen

From Yale to Jail: The Life Story of a Moral Dissenter
David Dellinger



The son of a well-to-do Boston lawyer, David Dellinger seemed cut out for a distinguished career in law or government. But rejecting his comfortable background, he walked out of Yale one afternoon during the Great Depression, in his oldest clothes and without any money, to ride the freight trains, sleep at missions, and stand in bread lines. Dave lived among the poor in Newark, was bloodied in the freedom marches through the South, and led countless hunger strikes in jail.

Dave's memoirs shed new light on many of the most crucial events of the 1960s. His inside account of what happened in those years, and of the people who shaped that decade — Martin Luther King, Jr., Abbie Hoffman, Bayard Rustin, A.J. Muste, Dorothy Day, Jerry Rubin, Joan Baez, and many more — is an indispensable chapter in the story of our time.

Additional praise for From Yale to Jail

"... There can be few people in the world who have crafted their lives into something truly inspiring. This autobiography introduces us to one of them, with the simplicity and integrity that have characterized everything Dave has done."
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— **Studs Terkel**

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'Rod' Kane Dies at 53 Wrote Book On Vietnam

BART BARNES

Rod Kane, medic, author, and VVAW member, died Thursday in a hospital in Virginia. Rod died of pneumonia and a hereditary lung disorder.

Rod was author of ***"Veteran's Day,"*** *a highly acclaimed memoir of his two tours as a medic with the 101st Airborne. The book also described his struggles with PTSD and his time with VVAW in Washington, D.C. Writing the book was Rod's way of trying to expunge his PTSD.*

Myself, John O'Connor, Mike Phelan, and Tim Butz, all once of the D.C. VVAW chapter, will miss Rod immensely.

Jack Mallory

THE WASHINGTON POST
Saturday,
November 6, 1999

Gerard "Rod" Kane, 53, a veteran of the war in Vietnam whose searing experiences of jungle combat in the early months of the war became the subject of an acclaimed memoir published 25 years later, died Nov. 3 at Inova Fairfax Hospital. He died of pneumonia and had a hereditary lung disease.

Mr. Kane was the author of ***"Veterans Day: A Vietnam Memoir,"*** published in 1990, a book that chronicled his bloody year in Vietnam in 1965 as a 19-year-old Army combat medic and the years of alcoholism, drug abuse, anger, despair, incarceration and hospitalization that followed.

He began writing his story in the early 1980s, after drunken driving arrests and thoughts of suicide led him to check himself into a Veterans Administration hospital, where he discovered that putting his story down on paper was a form of therapy that helped him confront the demons that continued to plague him. About this time, he began attending meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous, and at his death, he had been sober for 17 years.

Mr. Kane, a resident of Chevy Chase, was born in Utica, N.Y., and joined the Army in 1964. The following year, as a medical corpsman with the 1st Air Cavalry Division, he was at the Ia Drang Valley, where U.S. helicopters first ferried large units of troops into combat and U.S. commanders became committed to a "war of attrition" with search-and-destroy missions as the primary tactic.

Mr. Kane, who became known in his unit as "Doc," would come to characterize Vietnam as "The World of Live Ammunition." He would write later, "I become like a zombie. I forget just about everything that happens except that Two-Tone gets it. Kelly gets it. Grub gets it. Dino gets it. I'm losing a grip on just about everything I'm living for... I start to lose the dream of surviving so I could come back to that woman, a family. I started to sink into something like futility and despair."

When his enlistment was up, Mr. Kane became active in Vietnam Veterans Against the War, and he came to Washington in 1971 as part of a protest in which veterans threw down their military medals on the steps of the Capitol. He remained in Washington afterward, but he could not live down the Vietnam experience. "Nineteen years old and trying to decide who lives and who dies... Part of my heart is still over there ... part of my head, part of my life. I'm trying to bury it," he would say years later.

A network of friends helped support Mr. Kane in this period. When he fought with his housemates, they took him in. When he was broke, they lent him money or found him jobs. He was hard to get along with, and some of his friends gave up. But a few stayed with him. "I do have a lot of people taking care of me," Mr. Kane once said.

In 1977, a doctor diagnosed him with Alpha-one-antitrypsin deficiency, a rare hereditary condition that prevents the liver from producing a protein essential to proper lung functioning. Mr. Kane remembered the doctor telling him, "You drink, you smoke. You're done in three years." But he didn't care. "That's all I needed, I thought. Three years and I can get out of this sucker."

Not long after that, he got into a Vietnam veterans support group, which he said felt like home to him. He had been writing down his thoughts, and he showed his writing to a counselor who encouraged him to continue. He stopped doing drugs and alcohol, entered a treatment program for his lung condition at the National Institutes of Health and went to college, graduating from the University of the District of Columbia. For eight years, he worked on his book.

In a review in ***The Washington Post's*** Book World, freelance writer Marc Leepson wrote that ***"Veterans Day"*** "involves telling a story that features a main character — who is, of course, Kane himself — who is in nearly constant and deep pain ... an inspired piece of work. It is not a whiny, self-pitying cry for help. It is, rather, a provocatively written narrative that contains the details of one man's life."

In 1991, 20 months after publication of ***"Veterans Day,"*** Mr. Kane underwent a lung transplant at Fairfax Hospital, the first such procedure in the Washington area. His disease by then had progressed to the point where walking was difficult and the simple act of lowering himself into a chair was painful.

He had been retired on disability in recent years, but he lectured regularly at American University and Northern Virginia Community College on literature of the Vietnam War.

He was a founding member of the Memorial Day Writers Project, an organization of Vietnam Veteran writers who since 1993 have gathered at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Veterans Day and Memorial Day to read their work.

Survivors include three brothers and a sister.

Gar Macarthur 1921-1999

NORMA BECKER

Non-Violent Activist: The Magazine of the War Resisters League
Vol 16, No. 5
September-October 1999

Gar MacArthur, staunch peace and justice activist, died Aug. 24 after a prolonged illness.

Born in Canada, Gar served in its Air Force during World War II. Afterwards, in the United States, he became a committed social activist. As a member of the Chelsea (New York City) NAACP, he joined the civil rights struggle in the early '60s. During the Vietnam War, Gar worked with the Chelsea-Clinton Committee to End the War in Vietnam, the Greenwich Village Peace Center, the Vietnam Peace Parade Committee and the War Resisters League. Gar was among the earliest adult supporters of the draft resistance movement, helping resisters who needed to go to Canada and Sweden. After the war, he worked tirelessly for amnesty.

Perhaps his most passionate involvement was with the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. In addition to organizing support, he extended personal friendship and care to veterans returning to a country they felt had turned its back on them. His home became a safe harbor for many of these young men until they could get back on their feet.

Even after his health deteriorated and illness ravaged his memory, Gar never forgot to grab a handful of change for the homeless when leaving his apartment. He left behind may friends and neighbors in Chelsea who will mourn him.

Brainwashing Busts Out At Cecil Field

Mike Woloshin

I returned to the World with my squadron, ATKRON 86, on July 1, 1970. After shore duty in Da Nang and a nine-month Westpac cruise on the U.S.S. Coral Sea, I had forgotten the reality of the Stateside "chickenshit" Navy. Admiral Elmo Zumwalt ("The Z") became C.N.O. (Chief of Naval Operations) that day and a flurry of "Z-grams" issued from "Disneyland East" allowing enlisted men to grow beards (which I did), abolishing Liberty Cards and eliminating other "chickenshit" practices which contributed to the Navy's astounding 16% re-up rate for 1970. However, "The Z's" reforms were slow to reach N.A.S. Cecil Field, Florida.

In October 1970, I was assigned TAD to the AMD (Aircraft Maintenance Division). As a "bubble chaser" (Aviation Structural Mechanic - Hydraulics), I cleaned and repaired hydraulic system filters, broke down, replaced seals, tested and certified flight control activators, brakes and other hydraulic system components. I also had a sideline making custom pipes and smoking accessories from T-6061 aluminum tubing designed for 3,000 P.S.I. hydraulic systems.

The shop was run by Charlie Lynch, a First Class with thirteen years in, from Philadelphia, Mississippi. Despite his hometown (where civil rights workers Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner were murdered in 1964), he hated Navy racism — the most virulent kind — and Navy "chickenshit," particularly the Cecil Field variety. He drank coffee and shot the bull with the troops each morning, and as long as the work got done he didn't fuck with anyone. Although he wasn't expressly anti-war, he listened to our anti-war bull sessions and tolerated our anti-military attitudes.

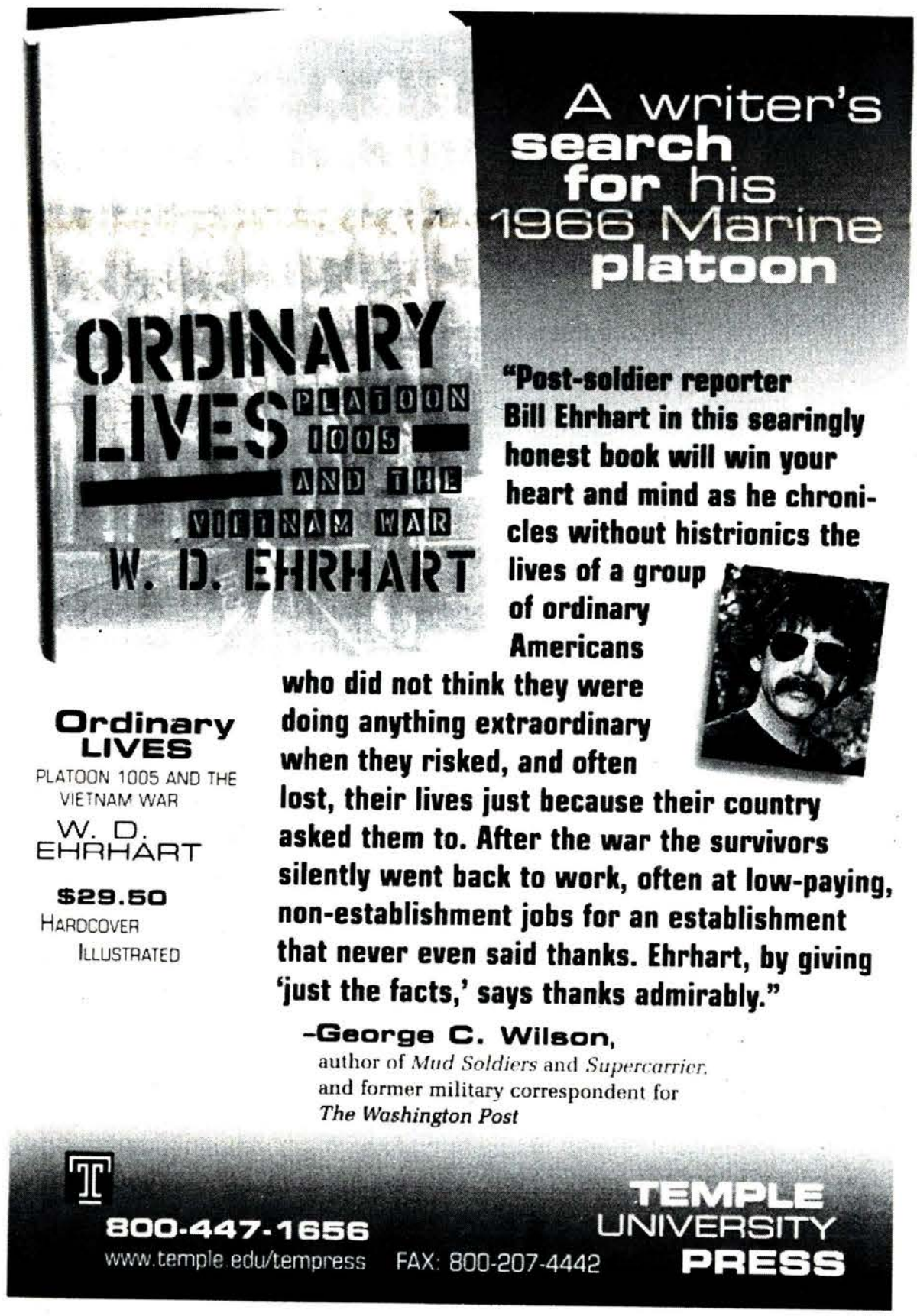
The airframes and hydraulics shops were under the command of Chief Warrant Officer H.J. Harrell and Senior Chief (often called Super Chief) Sonnetag, two of the biggest turds in the Navy. Often when a troop left the shop floor to make a head (latrine) call, he would announce that he was going to take a Harrell and then wipe his Sonnetag.

In early December 1970, I got word that I qualified for the early-out for March 1, 1971. I was getting short, had leave time on the books and put in a chit for three weeks beginning in the middle of the month. At the Monday morning inspection, a few days before I was to go on leave, Harrell announced a film showing for that afternoon.

After 29 years, I don't recall the name of the flick, but I'll never forget how ludicrous it was and how the troops reacted to it. It was a late 1960s Army propaganda film with a Jack Webb-like voice narrating the evils of the international communist conspiracy. It opened with a Tupamaro squad engaged in guerrilla operations against Uruguayan troops of the U.S.-backed regime of Jorge Pacheco-Areco. (In 1970, the Tupamaros executed a U.S. A.I.D. advisor Don Mitrione who was training Uruguayan police in torture techniques — events depicted in the Costa-Gavras film "State of Siege") When the Tupamaros gained turf in the staged combat footage, the audience responded with shouts of "kill, kill, kill," clapping and cheering. When the government troops gained ground, they responded with boos, hisses and curses. At one point Harrell stopped the flick and gave us a ration of shit about our commentary, lack of patriotism and urged us to take the "communist threat" seriously. As the flick ended with the Tupamaro squad leader escaping an ambush down river in a dugout canoe, there were more cheers, yells and applause.

Harrell and Sonnetag were royally pissed and let us know in no uncertain terms, but, like the rest of the troops, I didn't give a shit. I was getting short, going on leave and in a little over a month and half after, I returned. I would be gone!

Mike Woloshin is a former AMH-2, U.S.N. ATKRON 86 N.A.S. Cecil Field, Florida. He's also a member of the VVAW Chicago Chapter.



My View: On Standdowns

JOHN ZUTZ

Why do we participate in Standdowns?

Homelessness damages the physical and mental health of individuals who are homeless. Homelessness also threatens society as a whole by masking the needs for detoxification, psychiatric hospitalization, and even incarceration, and by fostering disease and crime.

There are large variances in the persistence of homelessness. About one-fifth of those on the streets are homeless for over four years, and about one-fifth are homeless for less than three months.

People with less education, people with mental health or substance abuse problems, people who have been incarcerated, and males generally, tend to be homeless longer than people without those characteristics. But even short bouts of homelessness expose individuals to severe depredations, disease, and victimization including assault, robbery, and rape.

Studies show that on any given day about one-third of the men in homeless shelters are veterans.

The Standdown programs in Chicago and Milwaukee are organized and run by veterans. They provide homeless vets and their families with the immediate needs of food, clothing and shelter. Participants are able to receive other services from health care to haircuts.

However, I believe our presence addresses the participants' mental health needs as well. Think about it. While walking to the bus, we come across these people, and we try to ignore them. Riding by in our cars, we don't even see them.

That's why Standdowns are important. We see them as people. We interact as equals (as veterans), rather than with pity or a handout. And they realize that someone, somewhere, gives a shit.

After all, very ordinary people can end up homeless through no fault of their own. It could happen to any one of us.

Chicago Summer Stanndown, 1999.

JOHN ZUTZ IS A MEMBER OF THE MILWAUKEE CHAPTER AND A VVAW NATIONAL COORDINATOR.

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April art from *Carry It On 2000 PEACE CALENDAR*: Vietnamese children photograph by C. David Thomas/Indochina Arts Partnership; many images from "Viet Nam: The People's Resistance" 1976 Peace Calendar published by Syracuse Peace Council. Collage by Dik Cool and Karen Kerney SCW ©1999

This collage is April art in the 2000 Peace Calendar published by Syracuse Cultural Workers

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Summer Homeless Standdown Report

ALEX BONICK AND HANK EMERLE

Representatives of many veterans' groups, including a significant showing from local chapters of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, converged in Chicago on a warm day in August to provide the basic rights of health care, food and shelter, at least for a day, to local homeless veterans. A crew of students and community members from Champaign-Urbana involved in social justice organizing were amongst those who volunteered for this year's annual Summer Standdown. These activists, mostly from the University of Illinois campus, are no strangers to VVAW. As activists in the Progressive Resource/Action Cooperative (PRC), which has been at the forefront of the decade-long struggle to rid the University of its racist mascot, "Chief Illiniwek," they have been witness to the relationship that the Champaign-Urbana and Chicago chapters of VVAW have had with the PRC over the years. These two VVAW chapters have been a constant source of support for the PRC, providing leadership development, event security training, and a presence at anti-chief rallies and protests.

Naturally, PRC members were enthusiastic about a chance to contribute time and labor in unity with VVAW on behalf of their homeless comrades. As those PRC members working at their first Standdown learned, the Chicago Standdown provides an impressive range of services to homeless veterans, from clothing and food to dental care and employment counseling. This event strives to make a difference on multiple levels, not only to satisfy the immediate needs of those veterans forgotten by those they served, but also to empower people to take action on their own behalf.

Upon their arrival at the Humboldt Park location of this year's Standdown, PRC members immediately joined up with those representing the Chicago VVAW chapter, handling labor-intensive kitchen and custodial duties: emptying trash, cooking meals, lugging supplies, washing dishes, and so on, amid the sweltering August weather. Although this weekend may not seem like much fun to your average college student, the PRC activists felt honored to support an organization with a long-standing tradition of fighting for the rights of the marginalized.

As Brooke Anderson, a student and member of both the PRC and VVAW put it, "This summer's Standdown was a great experience for all involved; it provided much-needed services for the homeless veterans, as well as an opportunity for student and veteran activists to communicate about the intersection of our social justice organizing efforts." Another PRC member commented that he was "proud to be working alongside such a diverse and hard-working group of volunteers."

Everyone who came up from Champaign-Urbana felt tired afterwards, but they are eager to return for the next Winter and Summer Standdowns.

ALEX BONICK IS A SENIOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AND WORKS WITH THE PRC. HANK EMERLE IS ALSO A SENIOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, A PRC MEMBER, AND A MEMBER OF THE CHAMPAIGN-URBANA CHAPTER OF VVAW.

An Interview with Bao Ninh

MARC LEVY

Part One

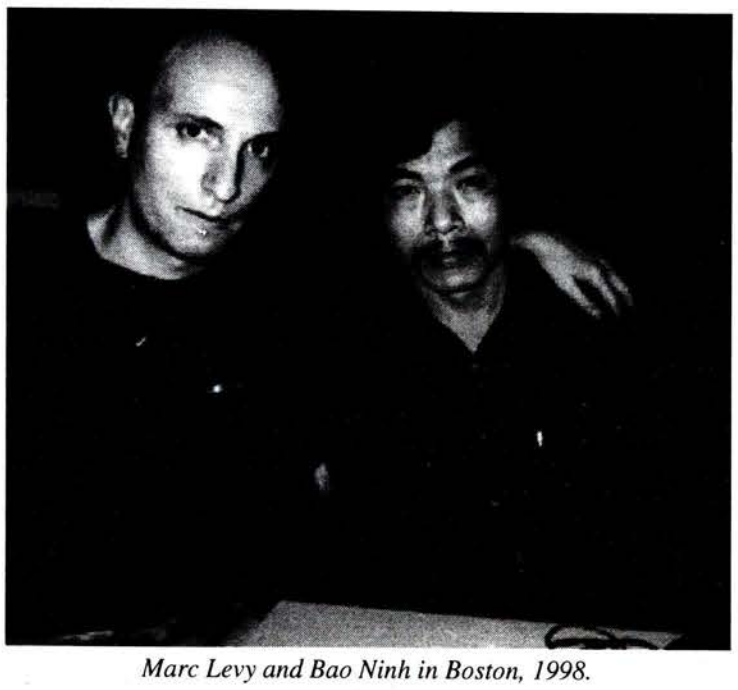
In 1995 I backpacked six months across Southeast Asia and Indonesia, and regretted not locating Bao Ninh, the former NVA solider and critically-acclaimed author of ***The Sorrow of War***, in Hanoi. In 1996 we corresponded once, and in 1998, by remarkable coincidence, I met him at The William Joiner Center Writers' Conference in Boston, Massachusetts. Following my unexpectedly emotional reaction, we agreed to meet later and speak at length about the daily life of NVA in combat.

About noon the next day we sat on the grass beneath a symmetrically planted grove of shade trees overlooking Boston Harbor. Except for the occasional sound of wind-rustled leaves, the setting was eerily reminiscent of rubber plantations I had fought in near An Loc and Loc Ninh. To my right was our youthful translator, Chau Thien Hiep, who for the next three hours promptly translated my questions from English to Vietnamese. Chau's English was rapid and flawless, in marked contrast to Bao Ninh's pensive manner and soft-spoken voice.

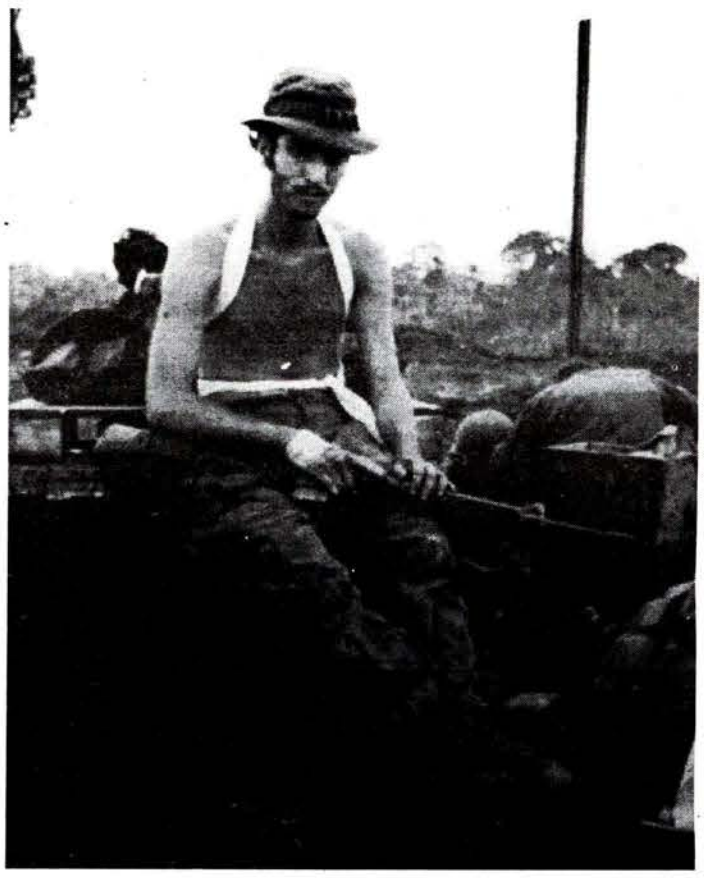
Ninh sat directly opposite me. He is a deceptively thin, wiry man in his late forties, standing perhaps 5' 6" tall. He sports an uncommonly bushy and tousled head of jet-black hair; a wispy black Fu Manchu mustache adorns the corners of his upper lip. Over the course of the afternoon his gaze varied from restless furtive eye contact to unblinking concentration. His general demeanor was outwardly calm and confident, even-keeled, but let the general reader, and the American combat veteran in particular, not be deceived. Bao Ninh spent six years of his life in the 514th Glorious Youth Brigade. Out of five hundred men and women in this unit, ten survived.

Unexpectedly, and not unlike Harrison Salisbury's experience thirty years ago in Hanoi when speaking with Premier Pham Von Dong, what followed was not the interview I had anticipated, but in some respects a lesson in mutual patience. Although my questions were direct and to the point, Ninh proved remarkably reticent, often sidestepping my queries about himself or the NVA in combat. Once this pattern was established I reluctantly gave way to meaningful, though less aggressive, inquiry. Only later did I more fully appreciate Bao Ninh's steadfast reserve.

I initiated the interview by asking Bao Ninh what he did as an NVA solider. He answered that his work was dangerous and that he was often at great risk observing American installations at close range. He noted this was the general function unit. I wondered if he had gathered information outside or inside base perimeters. Such information would be used for later attacks, vigorously rehearsed, the NVA going to great lengths to perfect every detail, building sandbox models, practicing for days, sometimes weeks, occasionally calling off missions if conditions were not favorable. In short, had he penetrated the defenses of American bases as an elite sapper, gathered intelligence, then escaped undetected? He refrained from comment.



Marc Levy and Bao Ninh in Boston, 1998.



Marc Levy in 1970, after the Cav walked back from Cambodia

When asked about the men and women in his unit, Bao Ninh noted the average ages were between 18 and 20 years old. He distinguished between soldiers from the countryside and soldiers from the city. He emphasized that in combat, food and other necessities were shared, that the NVA spoke informally to each other, and like soldiers everywhere made ample use of profanity.

What did the NVA talk about? Bao Ninh stated NVA troops most often spoke about sex and food, and exchanged jokes. He related that many of the younger male NVA, generally from the cities, hadn't experienced sex. An older rural solider might then engage a younger soldier in conversation about heterosexuality. Ninh also related that soldiers from the same province or city would often talk about home, and in particular their way of life. Soldiers from the same area might query one another about local schools and teachers or neighbors the other might know. Ninh emphasized that NVA from the city learned about village life from the country-dwelling NVA. Taught in school to believe food cooperatives were popular and held in high esteem, he noted that village life was in reality poverty-stricken and miserable. Although food harvests were shared equally, there was hunger and starvation.

On a lighter note, Bao Ninh remarked that jokes arose from the fact that members in units came from different cities and provinces. I asked him to give me an example of NVA humor. Ninh said the men in his unit made fun of the girls from Ha Tinh Province, whose chests and backsides were said to be of equal proportion. He recalled how the men would laugh at province girls whose breasts they compared to grapefruits.

Somewhat darkly, Ninh said that to keep morale up his unit avoided talking about past or recent contact or battles. When I asked about disease and other hardships of guerrilla warfare, he referred only to the debilitating effects of malaria. He did not speak about the incredibly difficult training and subsequent grueling marches up or down the Ho Chi Minh trail, the lack of food, the constant threat of American aerial assault, the sick or disabled left to rest or die in cloth hammocks or tree branches.

I asked Bao Ninh about the use of ideology in combat situations. I knew the NVA engaged in group and self-criticism sessions, something unheard of on the part of the Americans. He related that indeed the members of his unit were forced to study official ideology. However, under combat conditions this was done quickly and without the usual thoroughness. I asked what subjects ordinary NVA studied in and out of combat. Ninh fingered a line in the grass, then quickly replied:

continued on page 14

My View: On the Draft

John Zutz

There have been recent attempts to eliminate the Selective Service system and draft registration. These attempts are likely to be affected by the recent shortfalls in military recruiting. It seems our military can't recruit as many warm bodies as it needs. Several reasons have been advanced for this shortage:

• The economy is too good, so there are plenty of higher-paying civilian jobs available.

• The baby boomers, though aging, are still pretty much anti-military and are less likely to emphasize military service as an option to their kids (who are now of prime recruitment age).

• Young adults today just aren't as patriotic as they were in the past.

Whatever the reasons, government leaders and the media have been floating a trial balloon, presenting the possibility of reintroducing the draft. There has been little opposition raised so far.

Interestingly enough, one institution that has attempted to downplay this proposal is the military itself. The Pentagon is fairly *firmly urging* an all-volunteer force. Anti-draft activists have theorized that the military position recognizes ROTC's and JROTC's increased presence in high schools and colleges, and that conscription might create a backlash causing the armed services to lose rather than gain influence in the long run.

It seems our military can't recruit as many warm bodies as it needs.

Everyone interested is quick to reiterate that the draft isn't likely to be reinstated in the next few years.

Since the current draft registration system has run along untouched and largely unnoticed since our war in Vietnam ended, perhaps now is a good time to debate whether a draft is necessary or desirable.

It is apparent that the current system, registering eighteen-year-old males, is vulnerable to a court challenge on discrimination grounds. The military services currently have a significant percentage of females serving in almost all capacities. Any proposal to draft only males seems destined to fail.

One possible resolution, which hasn't received much consideration, is a requirement for universal national service, with no exceptions. Everyone reaching the age of eighteen would be responsible for two years of public service. Options for that service should not be limited to the military, but should include something like a new CCC, or Job Corps.

The Pentagon ought to like this proposal. It would widen the pool of possible recruits. It would maintain the "all-volunteer" nature of the military. Those opting for the military on a voluntary basis would be more likely to remain in the service longer than outright conscripts.

The civilian options for national service ought to provide pay scales and benefits similar to the military: job training, housing, health care, and the ability to earn money for college similar to the GI Bill.

Though no exceptions would be considered, there could be deferments. If eighteen-year-olds wanted to continue immediately to college, or even graduate school, they could be required to serve immediately after leaving school. Their increased skills and knowledge would then be used for the public good. Their GI Bill earnings might be applied to paying off their student loans.

Penalties for dodging the system could be similar to those for desertion.

Though the costs of running this system would be enormous, the benefits to society, directly through the services provided, and indirectly through the increased training and education provided to individuals, would outweigh the costs.

John Zutz is a member of the Milwaukee chapter and a VVAW national coordinator.

Interview with Bao Ninh

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tactics, strategy, policy. By tactics he may have been referring to the NVA/VC concept of "pit one against ten," where attacks took place against American fortified positions only if the NVA/VC had numbers superior to the defenders. If, and it is a significant if, Bao Ninh and his unit were involved in assault operations, they may have studied the best ways to approach and penetrate an American base, coordinating the elements that made up the attacking force: sappers, heavy weapons section, and the main assault unit. They may have prioritized their targets, starting with the American gun pits, then knocking out the command posts and ammunition dumps. Or, Bao Ninh may have been obliquely referring to the tactical doctrine "four quicks," one slow and three strong, which followed a strict and lethal sequence designed to take maximum advantage of methodical planning, surprise, superior numbers, and quick withdrawal, leaving the Americans in awe and wonder as to who had attacked so murderously, then vanished so mysteriously.

However, Bao Ninh declined to elaborate and later only briefly touched on policy as it related to NVA in the field. I asked Bao Ninh about the NVA equivalent of the American NDP (night defensive perimeter). I wanted to know more about the practice of the NVA soldiers digging L-shaped bunkers and the more elaborate bunker complexes I had encountered in Song Be Province in 1970. Bao Ninh made only a passing reference to bunkers being dug at fixed positions. He noted that in action, when on the move, each individual solider dug a trench for his own use. This concurred with my readings, which described individual L-shaped positions with an open trench on one end 1.2 meters long, 1.2 meters deep and 0.4 meters wide. Though more notably, he did not comment on the ARVN and American respect for NVA/VA soldiers dug into either temporary or base-camp defensive positions. After many casualties sustained by using direct assaults, the Americans learned to use artillery fire, gunships and tactical air strikes to destroy the well-defended and fanatical NVA/VC troops.

I asked Ninh about the range of feelings he and the soldiers in his unit experienced during and after combat. He said the NVA cried or were sad when there were deaths or casualties. And what of religious ceremonies after the retrieval of the wounded or dead? To provide comparison, I described how the Americans would fly chaplains into the jungle, more often than not on paydays, who would then conduct song and prayer, often with our weapons and ammo scattered carelessly about. Ninh stated that in his unit all the troops were communist, and therefore no religious ceremonies were observed. The dead were mourned and buried. Recalling his book, I pressed Bao Ninh on this subject, but to no avail. Later, under somewhat different circumstances, he would reveal deeper feelings. For the present he remained implacable.

I returned to a previous subject. If the NVA soldiers didn't talk about ongoing battles, or battles they had fought in, what was the general morale? Ninh provided an eloquent and perhaps doctrinaire answer. Although everyone feared death, the NVA soldiers in his unit had a clear focus: to fight for the independence of the country. Perhaps this was true, since the Vietnamese had successfully fought the Chinese for a thousand years, then the Japanese, then the French, then the Americans. Though perhaps not. The title of his masterful book flashed across my mind.

Nearly three hours had passed. Did Bao Ninh wish to make a final comment to me? Was there something he wanted to say that I had overlooked? For the first time, I discerned a trace of emotion in his voice and face. The NVA were not robots, he said through Chau. We were human beings. That is what you must tell people. We were human beings.

continued in next issue

Marc Levy is a Vietnam vet who participated in the Cambodian invasion in 1970.

A Gift from the State

HORACE COLEMAN

(On my first birthday after coming back from the war the Guard went to Kent to settle a score)

I
Bright cloth snapping on a pole
is not the flag.
Buildings are not the land.
History is not a true book.
We are these things.

II
They were accused of being young
and convicted of having hope and
wanting change.

Rash, they were.
Guilty of not loving the status quo.
Premature peace wanters.

For long hair, no bras,
and opposition,
they were executed.
Thinking their middle class skins
could shield the sins
of tired, stupid men.

III
Remember how they shot the girl
leaving her classroom? And the boy
walking by? And the boy who would
never walk again?

Remember how the dead ones became
dangerous revolutionaries (in their graves)
and syphilitic whores (when dirt filled their mouths)?
So the pretend soldiers could pretend
they hadn't wasted their ammo and
the towns folk could feel good about not
feeling bad.
And the people could
elect the governor again and think
the war was safe after coming home to visit.

IV
Their lives were candles
put in a breeze.
Remember?
Blown out untimely.
Remember?
And no one wanted
to put out the darkness
or even curse it.

Building A Raft At The Pond

DAVE CONNOLLY

My neighbors at the pond thank me
For what they think is "hard work."
Four hours under a clear July sky,
Cold beers and easy laughs
Over the screw-ups we each made
(And didn't want the wives to see);
Working with two upright men, fathers
Who come home from a day's work in the sun
And throw their kids in the pond.

"Hard work?"

All I could think of was the 'Nam,
Digging and building defensive positions,
Using whatever we had or could find each night,
Working to put something, anything, between us
And the Viet Cong rockets and mortars:
See, they always knew where we were.

So this here raft isn't work: it's pure joy.
I don't think I'll tell my neighbors why:
They wouldn't understand.

But I'll damn sure tell their sons.

Tin Soldiers and Nixon's Army

continued from page 1

first weekend in May, student activists on campus pressed forward protesting the war. Off campus, some students and "townies" confronted police, and went on a trashing binge in the bar district on the evening of May 1. Though unrelated to any movement political activities on campus, the mayor of Kent, Leroy Satron, contacted Ohio governor Rhodes, requesting that National Guard forces be sent and stating that SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) had taken control of a part of the city of Kent. With absolutely no basis in fact, forces yet unseen had been set in motion.

By May 2, elements of the Ohio National Guard, Troop G of the 2nd Company, 107th Armored Cavalry and companies A&C of the 145th Infantry Regiment had arrived in Kent. They entered the campus area of Kent State University without authorization, following the burning of the ROTC building on the same evening. Subsequent investigation of the fire by the authorities failed to place any blame on a specific group, student or otherwise. The university at no time requested the presence of the National Guard and later investigation revealed that the Portage County Sheriff's Department and the Ohio State Police felt that there was no overt threat on campus.

The Ohio National Guard units brought to Kent had problems of their own. Fresh from the teamster strike in the Cleveland area, these particular guardsmen were battered, beaten and exhausted. Ironically, fresh Guard units, specially trained for riot duty, were stationed nearby, sitting unused.

The day and evening of May 3 saw an escalating spiral of violence as the Guard units began to teargas and bayonet groups of students whenever they tried to gather. Addressing the assembled Guard troops that evening, Governor Rhodes took the stage, saying, "No one is safe in Portage County. It is just that simple. No one is safe, and I do not believe that people understand the seriousness of these individuals who are organized in a revolutionary frame of mind." Coupled with earlier statements of National Guard officers promising an armed response to student demonstrations, the stage was set for the tragic events of May 4.

After a morning filled with confrontation and Guard marches, the fatal events unfolded. At 12:24 P.M., a group of guardsmen marched up Blanket Hill near Taylor Hall, turned in an orderly line, raised their weapons and fired on the students, some as far away as 390 feet. When the firing stopped, four students lay dead: Jeff Miller, Allison Krause, Bill Schroeder, and Sandy Scheuer. Thirteen others were wounded, several so severely that they are disabled to this day.

The national outcry against these shootings brought massive demonstrations around the country, closing hundreds of colleges and universities, and culminating in giant anti-war marches on both coasts. The intention to stifle the student movement had backfired, energizing it further. Ohio politicians moved to cover up the murders. Indictments were brought against the wounded students, charging them with responsibility for the events. Subsequent investigations by the FBI and the Justice Department, while hardly sympathetic to the students, clearly pointed the finger of guilt at the guardsmen, their officers, and the governor. The Ohio government moved as quickly as possible to stage a grand jury, pre-empting any federal jury of the same type, with the full cooperation of the Nixon administration. The guilty walked.

Ten days after the Kent State shootings, Mississippi state police shot two students to death at Jackson State University in South Carolina. Turning from the black communities and inner cities across the country, brute force and legalized murder became the order of the day on campus as well. Using the Law Enforcement Assistance Act (LEAA), Nixon handed out billions of dollars to police forces everywhere, arming them with weapons developed for the war in Indochina and creating an instant network of paramilitary forces, in effect a national police force. Vice President Spiro T. Agnew proudly proclaimed, "We have buried the student movement in the U.S." Nothing could have been further from the truth.

The anti-war and minority rights movements were unbowed and grew stronger from the experiences. The decade that followed included year after year of rallies and demonstrations at Kent State. The Ohio State Police assumed the role of the heavies, beating, bashing and gassing participants year after year. We in VVAW were always there. The "Struggle to Stop The Gym," which was to be built on the spot where the students died, was the scene of particularly vicious attacks by the university and state police. Fortunately, as time has passed, the annual events at Kent have drawn a much more reasonable response from the university. The 15th, 20th and 25th commemorations have gone easier.

Thanks to the unflagging commitment and support of the Kent State students, the programs have continued over the years. VVAW has kept its commitment to help keep the spirit of Kent State alive over the years. Beginning in 1970, when vets founded the Kent Chapter of VVAW, up to the present, we have seen the importance of remembering the events of Kent State 1970 for the student movement of today. Please join with us in supporting the students of KSU at the 30th anniversary of the shootings at Kent State on May 4, 2000.

Kent State, 1990.

BILL DAVIS IS A VIETNAM VET AND FORMER US AIR FORCE STAFF SGT. DAVIS HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF VVAW FOR 30 YEARS.

For more information about the VVAW contingent at the Kent State 30th Anniversary, contact the VVAW National Office at (773)-327-5756 or e-mail <vvaw@prairienet.org>.

Let Nicaragua Live

Louis De Benedette

I did not come to Boaco, Nicaragua in March with plans to stay here for more than six months. I came to visit the disabled vets of the war, whom I have known since the Veterans' Peace Convoy of '87, and to chaperone my godson, Gonzalo, who is from Peru. My article about his mother, Guadalupe, appeared in ***The Veteran*** in '95 while I was in federal prison for my protest at the School of the Americas. Guadalupe was disappeared by the Peruvian military in 1990, and her husband was disappeared in '83. She became a human rights monitor, helping other relatives of the disappeared and looking for her husband, a union organizer. Fugimore continues his repression of the Peruvian Indian, and, unfortunately, the people are on his side, making the situation in Peru more terrible than ever. I brought my godson (whose sister came with me to VVAW's 30th anniversary) to learn the struggle of the Sandinista Party and to prepare him for the non-violent struggle in the Andes his mother had done before him. I now believe that I, too, am here to learn from the Sandinista their non-violence and love for the poor, who are many and suffer greatly at the hands of unbridled capitalism, privatization, neo-liberalism, the current Aleman government, and, most profoundly, intervention of the United States. Even the Peace Corps is in Boaco. I encountered an Army reservist in uniform in the street. I think that I am going to stay here as an obligation, and remain in solidarity with the vets here. VVAW is my community and I want you to know that we are important to the poor of Nicaragua and the Sandinista Party.

Boaco is located seventy miles northeast of Managua. There are many hills and many cattle and horses. There is also the very poor. There are many disabled vets within the six pueblos of Boaco. I live in the city near my friend Antonio O'Porta, wheelchair vet, to whom I gave money in 1989 to start his leather shop. I visited Fernando Lopez who was with us, together with Pastor Hernandez, at Kent State in 1990. Fernando has adopted two children, but lost the elections for Sandinista selectman in Managua in 1996. He is also a wheelchair vet. The situation of the disabled vets is not good. The average benefit is $30 a month which is not enough to survive. Nicaragua has 70% unemployed and is in a race with Haiti for the distinction of being the poorest country in Latin America. It was impossible for me to help disabled veterans effectively as I had thought.

I began meeting with FSLN department leaders in April and decided to raise funds to rebuild their office in Boaco, which was destroyed by an arsonist in 1997. The directivia was using borrowed space in another office. We felt that a new office would aid the struggle for disabled vets, since it would provide space for interviews and meetings that were needed to plan strategy for elections and protests. The initial phase of the reconstruction was completed on July 19, just in time for the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution. After I returned from the large celebration in Managua, Mark Swanfeldt (a new VVAW member) and I were special guests at the inauguration of the building. Both Mark and I funded the project, which cost about $5,000 at this point. We need about $2,000 to complete the remaining work, which includes three offices and a large meeting area. Brian Wilson has donated $150. If you can send anything, even a dollar, send it to Barry Romo, who will get it here. The Clarence Fitch Chapter is sponsoring the project.

I have built, with my disability money, two houses for vets and one for a mother whose husband was killed in the war. The houses, just outside the city, are made of cardboard and plastic, but the tropical weather, now in the rainy season, is not merciful. I am good friends now with a family of veterans of the war. Six brothers and sisters are all combat vets, and they all live in these houses; they are very poor and have many children. They were all officers in the Sandinista Army until the RIF under Violeta Chamora in 1990, when the United States intervened in the elections with its propaganda over a protracted war and conscription. Aleman has not helped the retired officers either, and there has been protest over land that had been given to the officers by Chamora. My friends, the Sanchezes, have yet to get claim to the land that is theirs by law. The Contra fare better than the Sandinista ex-officers. I recently funded a school reconstruction project, and Juan Sanchez and others did the work. The school has twenty-five first and second graders — very poor and needy — and it was collapsing with age. Juan has organized the sector, Barreo Puerta Cabeza, and formed a group of Frente Sandinista. Its purpose is to win the elections for mayor in 2000 and the presidency for the Sandinista in 2001. I built his home so he could lead the struggle.

Cmdt. Daniel Ortega said in the National Assembly of the FSLN in June '99 that he knows no other solution for the poverty and the corruption of the current Aleman government than to win the elections. He said he wants socialism, one party Sandinista, and no intervention from the United States. He advocated non-violence, including barricades and marches. A student was killed by the police in March while protesting non-violently. I had the honor of eating with Daniel in May when he visited Boaco. The poor love this soldier and know that he is for them. I spoke to Daniel about the Vietnam era, and he knew how terribly we were betrayed. I could see the sorrow in his eyes. We need to remember that he was a military leader who helped win a revolution and withstood the raving Contra of President Reagan. Like Vietnam, the Contra war need not have existed if it were not for the greed of our dirty rotten system. Daniel suggested that I stay

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Open Letter To The U.S.Congress

VVAW Clarence Fitch Chapter - NY/NJ

This letter was sent by the Clarence Fitch Chapter to all members of Congress. It was also distrubuted to participants in the Veterans Day parade in New York City, as well as local progressive organizations.

In testimony before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee in April 1971, a representative of Vietnam Veterans Against the War concluded by saying:

"Thirty years from now when our brothers go down the street without a leg, without an arm and small boys ask why, we will be able to say 'Vietnam' and not mean a filthy obscene memory, but mean instead the place where America finally turned and where soldiers like us helped in the turning."

That statement sums up why many of us who fought in that war came home and fought against it. After the war ended, we have continued to demand that this country learn the real lessons of the Vietnam experience and change course as a nation, acting in cooperation with other countries instead of trying to impose our will on them.

We soon learned that was not what the rulers had in mind. Many of our national leaders focused on trying to overcome the "Vietnam Syndrome" of public reluctance to intervene militarily abroad. The Pentagon learned that deception and a controlled press could defuse the American people's opposition to military adventures temporarily as long as the body count of American GIs was kept low enough.

It started again with military advisors, arms shipments and covert operations in El Salvador, Nicaragua and other countries of Latin America. Troops were sent to Lebanon, Grenada, Panama, Haiti and Somalia. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, politicians excitedly declared us "the world's only superpower." The Persian Gulf War against Iraq marked a more aggressive military posture. America was again trying to be the policeman of the world and military force was again the primary instrument of U.S. foreign policy.

Now we have witnessed Clinton's shameful "victory" in the Balkans. In the name of opposing the Milosevic regime's crimes against the Albanians of Kosovo, the President acted in violation of the United Nations Charter as well as the U.S. Constitution and War Powers Act. U.S./NATO air power was unleashed for 78 days triggering an escalation of "ethnic cleansing" and the resulting refugee crisis as well as causing the deaths of thousands of civilians and the destruction of much of the economic structure of Serbia and Kosovo. Ironically the agreement ending the air war was less then what had been agreed to by the Yugoslav government before the attacks began.

Hypocritically waving a "humanitarian" flag cannot hide the fact that this war was a return to the imperial practices that can only lead to disaster for this country. We call on our elected representatives in Congress to halt this present militarist course and to take the following actions:

1. Hold the President accountable. It is the duty of the Congress, not the President, to decide whether we go to war. Congress's shameful behavior, including failure to invoke the War Powers Act, gave Clinton and his cronies Albright, Cohen and Berger the green light for their assault. This can only be considered dereliction of duty and betrayal of the people's trust.

2. End hostilities against Yugoslavia and Iraq. Reconstruction assistance should be given to all the peoples of the Balkans who have suffered. Rebuilding and reconciliation, not military occupation, is what is needed. Talks should also be reopened with Iraq and the economic embargo, which is killing Iraqi civilians daily, must be ended.

3. Stop excessive military spending. The "success" of the air war will be used to promote even more money for the bloated military budget (already 265 billion dollars this year). Instead of enriching weapons manufacturers, tax dollars should go to social programs that benefit the people, including disabled, homeless, and sick veterans who need help. The massive cuts in the VA health care system must be reversed and those suffering from Gulf War Illness, Agent Orange and atomic radiation poisoning should be given treatment and compensation NOW.

4. End U.S. support for foreign military dictatorships. From Vietnam to Nicaragua, Iran and the Philippines, the American government has often supported corrupt and repressive regimes who deny their own people a decent living and basic human rights. This has put our government at odds with the people of those lands who are fighting for justice and democracy. U.S. support for the Indonesian military and the crisis in East Timor shows that this continues today. We need to support the people's struggles for freedom not those who oppress them.

5. Support the United Nations. When the UN was formed, it was recognized as the international organization responsible for maintaining world peace. Sadly, American diplomats have repeatedly ignored or sidestepped decisions that go against their foreign policies. The NATO war against Yugoslavia was a flagrant usurpation of United Nations authority. The U.S. has not even paid its UN dues for years. This sad state of affairs must stop and America must truly join the community of nations.

We submit this letter out of righteous concern for our country's future. We call on our Congressional representatives to join in the struggle to change America's present direction so that the sacrifices of our brothers and sisters who fought and died in Vietnam and other wars will not be in vain. We will keep the faith! WILL YOU?

Vietnam Veterans Against the War Clarence Fitch Chapter (NY-NJ)

Clarence Fitch Chapter Statement on Vieques

Dave Cline

This is the (reconstructed) text of Dave Cline's statement at the Pearl Harbor Day press conference in New York City.

Hello, my name is David Cline. I am a disabled Vietnam veteran. I hold 3 Purple Hearts, a Bronze Star and a Combat Infantryman's Badge. I served with the 25th Infantry Division in Vietnam in 1967. Over the years since my return I have been involved in many veterans causes and am a member of numerous veterans organizations.

Today is the day that all Americans remember Pearl Harbor. And while we remember what President Franklin D. Roosevelt called "a day that will live in infamy," we mourn the loss of the lives of over 2000 brave men and women in the Japanese attack.

And today we have also come to condemn the US Navy's continuing occupation and bombardment of the Puerto Rican island of Vieques. The attack on Pearl Harbor was 58 years ago. That attack lasted less than one day. World War II lasted 4 more years. Ironically the use of Vieques as a bombing range also began in 1941. But for Vieques the bombing never ended. There has been no peace for Vieques, only 58 years of bombs, shells and destruction.

Several weeks ago, several of us went to demonstrations in Jersey City and New York City in support of Vieques. We talked it over and decided to begin organizing a initiative to rally US veterans in support of the struggle on Vieques. We understood what the people there were fighting for. Through our own experiences, many of us have first-hand knowledge of the Pentagon's callous disregard for humans and the environment.

Veterans Support Vieques is made up of US military veterans of all nationalities and races. Puerto Ricans have served bravely and with honor in this nation's wars. All Puerto Ricans are United States citizens. Yet the continued destruction of Vieques and the Navy's continued refusal to leave — despite overwhelming opposition throughout Puerto Rico — shows that the US government regards them as 2nd class citizens. This is totally unacceptable.

We were brothers then and we are brothers again. Today we have Black, Latin, Asian, Native American and White veterans here and we are united. In our group are people who have served in this country's wars in Vietnam and Korea. This brother up here [point-

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Support Kosovar People's Right To Self-Determination!

BARRY ROMO, JOE MILLER AND BILL BRANSON

The bombs have stopped dropping on Serbia and Kosovo, but the tragic consequences of Serbian nationalism, ethnic cleansing and apartheid, have not disappeared.

More than 750 thousand Kosovars, almost all Muslim, will be living under plastic sheets this winter, not because of earthquakes or other environmental causes, but because of Serbian aggression. The actual toll in lives, those killed, tortured and raped, will probably never be known. But Patriarch Pavle of the Serbian Orthodox Church has been shocked by the available evidence of these atrocities. He decided to break the silence by declaring many of his countrymen guilty of horrific crimes. It is important to remember that the Serbian church is not an evangelical ministry but a cultural and nationalistic church that has not spoken out against oppression of Muslims before.

It must also be remembered that the Serbian apartheid policies against Muslims were far worse than Jim Crow in America or apartheid in South Africa. For more than a decade, Muslim Albanians were denied all civil service jobs, from garbage collector to university professor. In Milosevic's move toward a "Greater Serbia" he denied all civil, cultural and political rights to the people who lived in Kosovo for more than a thousand years.

Even though NATO was victorious and the genocidal Serbian military and militia were expelled, justice still has not been served. The United Nations and NATO have not set up a war crimes tribunal to deal with criminals. There is still no civil or political rule by the 95% Muslim population. This has led to individual retribution by Muslim victims of Serb atrocities in an attempt to take justice into their own hands. We have seen this before, from Rwanda to Cambodia.

VVAW has always sided with an oppressed people's right to self-determination and independence. We have consistently stood with the people of Vietnam to East Timor. Guided by a principle of freedom, we do not believe that people should be slaughtered or held in national captivity because of boundaries set by nationalists or imperialists. Of course, this is not a blank check. For example, we would not have supported the South's right to secede for slavery, or Rhodesia's right to apartheid.

We have never cared about the so-called "legality" of any war. If a war is just we support it, and if a war is unjust we oppose it, no matter the Constitution or the UN resolution. Korea and the Gulf War were both "legal" by U.S. and UN legalities, and yet no one in VVAW would have supported those unjust conflicts.

In Cambodia, the Vietnamese drove out the genocidal Pol Pot dictatorship. This went against "accepted" international conventions and the UN Charter. However, the oppression of the Cambodian people and the righteousness of the Vietnamese offensive in the real world stood above abstract law.

For more than thirty years, VVAW has stood for a reality not tied to abstract legalisms and excuses. We have supported black people's rights even when the law denied them. We supported Native American rights at Wounded Knee even when U.S. law denied them. Human rights, REAL rights, REAL people suffering and dying are the basis of our political reality and our social justice activism, not the abstractions of a third year law student or some pompous academic.

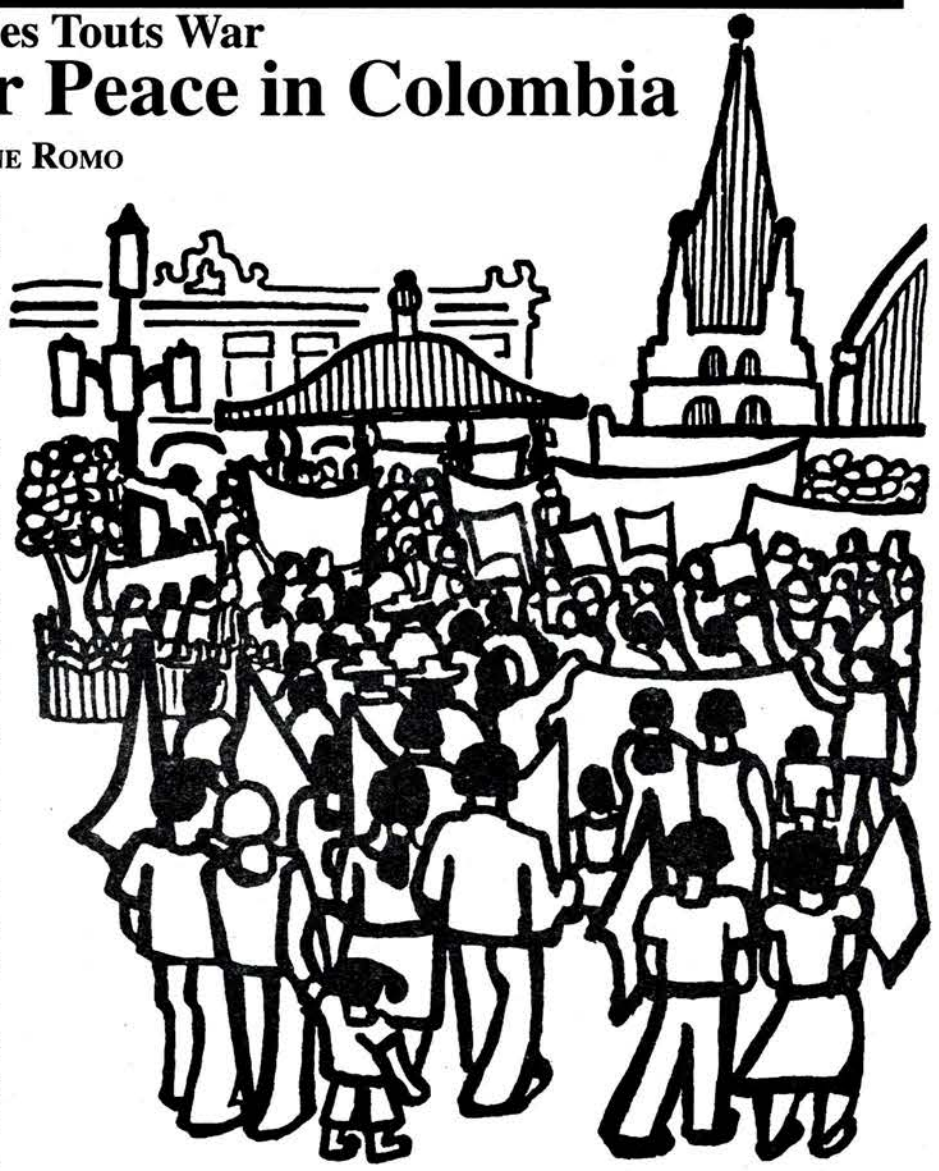
BARRY ROMO, BILL BRANSON AND JOE MILLER ARE ALL MEMBERS OF THE VVAW NATIONAL OFFICE.

Fatigues for Freedom Fighters, 1977.

United States Touts War

12 Million Rally for Peace in Colombia

Alynne Romo



Twelve million Colombians — one in three — turned out for October 24 pro-peace demonstrations under the slogan, "No Mas" (no more). Rallies in 18 cities and 800 towns called for progress in the peace talks and an end to violence against civilians. Although Colombians are hoping this unprecedented anti-war movement will light a fire under negotiations, there are minority factions within the guerrillas and government who still want war. And our government agrees.

Led by conservative Republicans, Congress is falling for Southcom's plot to send one billion dollars annually to police Colombia for the next three years. Human rights critics have fought the funding because Colombia's military and its attached paramilitary groups are accountable for over 70 percent of the human rights abuses and the military maintains a system of impunity.

Will It Stop Drugs?

The drug trade permeates all sectors of Colombian society including money-laundering bankers, bribed politicians, paramilitary groups that were started by the military/narcotrafficker alliance, peasants and the guerrillas.

Some in the U.S. government always alleged that guerrillas were involved in drugs. Col. John D. Waghelstein, writing in ***Military Review***, explained that the way to counter groups that support Latin American rebels is to put them "on the wrong side of the moral issue" by creating "a melding of the American public's mind and in Congress" of the narco-guerrilla connection. In reality, it is only recently that the rebels got involved and it is thanks to the United States.

A few years ago, coca was grown in Peru. Efforts spearheaded by the United States to put Peru's coca-growers out of business created new opportunities for Colombia's peasant farmers to replace their existing crops with the more profitable coca. At first, the coca was grown near cities. But with anti-drug operations pushing cultivation into the countryside, it landed right in guerrilla territory. Rebels levy a "tax" on all goods trucked through their turf, including coca and processing supplies. That tax increases the cost for coca-paste producers and prompts them to send paramilitaries into rebel areas. The rebels, in turn, reap huge financial rewards from the taxes, and although some rebel leaders maintain their ideological orientations, others appear to enjoy their new power.

Our government has made no indication that it understands these contradictions. It plans to end drug production by scorching the earth while paramilitary groups "drain the water from the fish." Although paramilitaries guard huge drug production facilities, the United States says nothing.

If you know anyone who buys the idea that another $3 billion will fix this problem, you might want to point out to them the last $3 billion yielded zero net drop in the drug supply. Despite aerial defoliants, Colombian coca production has risen 260 percent, and drug profits are so high that the average drug organization can lose 70-80 percent of its product and still be profitable. The annihilated Medillin and Cali cartel were replaced by other traffickers. And drug treatment is seven times more effective than domestic policing, ten times more effective than interdiction and 23 times more effective than attacking drugs at the source.

And you might add that the now-muddy civil war kills civilians. Colombia has 100-200 massacres a year. Its human rights workers, community leaders and peace advocates are targets. Its labor leaders account for over half of labor unionists killed worldwide. Catholic church aid workers are victims and at least 35 Protestant pastors have been assassinated. Over 100,000 people are dead and 1.5 million people are refugees.

The United States has incarcerated a generation of minority youth here at home. This "war on drugs" serves no good purpose. Congress needs to spend that money wisely before we O.D. on destruction.

Alynne Romo works with the Colombia Support Network.

Let Nicaragua Live

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in Nicaragua; I think that I will for a little time more, since here in Nicaragua I feel that I cannot lose my conscience, and that my struggle against U.S. intervention can continue here as it did with all my brothers and sisters of the VVAW. I want to stay here since I want Nicaragua to LIVE.

My article is not a fund-raiser letter, since there is no amount of money sufficient to bring back to life the dead who were killed by U.S. weapons here in the wars with Samoza and the Contra. Nor can money bring back to life the babies who died daily for lack of medicine or food. There is nothing free here, as there was during the Sandinista government. I want you all to know that Nicaragua is suffering greatly. Nicaragua has many veterans like ourselves who continue to struggle against evil. The vets that I know were twelve and fifteen years old when they began to kill. They are now only thirty-six years old and have children; I do not think that they have come home yet. I need you to remember the Sandinista vets and the Nicaraguan people as our most cherished friends and help support them in this time of crisis. By their non-violence and political elections, the Sandinistas can regain the seat of government and provide for the poor. Only the FSLN is concerned about the poor. I want Nicaragua to live, I want Daniel Ortega to live, I want his soldiers to live and I want the children and the women and the old people to live. The Sandinista must win the elections for the poor to make it; this is a fact. They gave me thorazine and put me in the psychiatric ward when I protested the Vietnam War. Many of you saw the horror of war. I love these vets here, and I want Nicaragua to live. I know that all of you do too. They can do it, and we will not let the United States intervene to stop them.

Peace, Louie

• • • • • • •

If anyone is interested in donating funds, I am sure that the Sandinista vets here would be grateful. The needs here are to provide funds to transport the vets when they protest in Managua, funds for transport to meetings in Boaco, and funds for the health and care of their children. You may send me used children's clothing, ages 6 to 13, shoes, men's pants and shirts, sizes 30-34, shirts, small. I am donating almost all my disability money during my time here.

Above all, send a letter of solidarity from your chapter to the veterans here. Send money to Barry Romo or Ben Chitty, and letters to the vets to me at:

APTD. POSTAL #23,
BOACO, NICARAGUA,
tel/fax 001-505-842-1685.

The mail gets here! Write me if you can.

U Of I Doctoral Graduate Made Political Prisoner

WILFREDO ROSARIO GONZALEZ

Being proud of one's parents is not a typical state of mind for many young people. However, special circumstances in life can change the way one visualizes a parent, notably when dignity and integrity come shining through. One example is that of Dr. José Solís Jordán-González, my stepfather, the person whom I will always call Dad.

Scores of commando gear-clad FBI "special" agents raided my home in Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico soon after 6:00 on the morning of November 7, 1997. After "securing" the premises — mainly, releasing pepper spray into our backyard, pointing FBI-issue assault rifles at a sleepy ten-year-old girl, and strip-searching the "suspect," my dad was whisked away aboard an FBI car and taken to the United States Federal Building in Hato Rey, Puerto Rico. There the clueless Dr. Solís was bombarded with typical interrogation-style comments: "cooperate and we'll make all of this disappear." By the third or fourth hour my dad was informed of the "accusation" against him, without him having seen his lawyer. Dr. Solís's presence in the building was unknown to any Federal employee, according to the lawyer who was crisscrossing the building during the interrogation. And to make this story even harder to believe, the FBI produced a document claiming it was written and signed by Dr. Solís: a "confession" statement.

What were the charges? Conspiracy, manufacture and transportation of illegal explosives, and destruction of government property. Where? A naval recruiting facility on Chicago's north side. Destruction was limited to a military car being burned from the inside. When? Early December 1992. The "evidence"? The accusation of a paid FBI "informant," Rafael Marrero — the publisher of an underground newspaper in Chicago dedicated to slandering several leaders of Chicago's Puerto Rican community.

Yet with the weight of such a "respectable" (lest we forget COINTELPRO in the 70s and Waco, Texas just a few years ago) law enforcement agency and the testimony of Rafael Marrero (who produced no credible evidence), my dad was convicted (March 12, 1999) and sentenced to 51 months in prison (July 7, 1999). My dad's refusal to fabricate lies against Chicago's Puerto Rican leaders led to his conviction by a jury not of his peers. That makes him a political prisoner.

For this act of courage and integrity, his human rights are violated every day. His integrity as a human being fills me with incredible pride. I know, as his son, that one day justice will be served and that day will be that much sweeter for myself and for my family. The nation of Puerto Rico will have justice served when such acts are duly recognized. El Grito de Lares, celebrated annually each September 20, has become a focal point for those who seek the only dignified solution to Puerto Rico's colonial status: independence. It represents the hope inside every Puerto Rican for the potential to be happy and dignified as an equal member of the family of independent nations — without the injustice of colonialism.

This is why a statement from a Ph.D. recipient in Education at the University of Illinois is of any importance. It fills me with a profound sense of joy to have the privilege of calling Dr. José Solís Jordán-González Dad.

WILFREDO ROSARIO GONZALEZ IS A GRADUATE STUDENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS.

El Grito De Lares

DR. JOSÉ SOLÍS JORDÁN-GONZÁLEZ

Today, as I sit in a prison cell, I hear in the background news about the release of some of our compañeras and compañeros from U.S. prisons. The only aspect that draws the attention of most people is the use of a language of fear. It has historically been the case that a people raised on a militaristic and hateful foundation is hard-pressed to seek a more just and human co-existence, and so the media pre-empts news of their release by presenting news of political violence elsewhere in the world. God bless all people who struggle that social justice may nourish the future of the human spirit and that love as a motivation and not hate or destruction be the guiding force. And it is of that which I wish to share with you today as we commemorate El Grito de Lares of September 23, 1868. The release of our political prisoners — and we must demand the immediate release of all Puerto Rican political prisoners — is painful for the colonizer, not because of what they allegedly did, but because it represents the reaffirmation of the Puerto Rican nation: a people, a culture, a nation of our own without the need to be hyphenated and thus legitimized by the colonizer. What makes it so difficult for the colonizer, who hides behind a language of terror, is his inability and resistance to love as a human, to understand as a free person, to appreciate as a citizen. As long as the colonizer believes his freedom is guaranteed at the expense of others, he will never be free, and so the persistence of the militarization of our country, of our land.

And yet, on this Grito de Lares we can reflect upon and celebrate our nationhood, maybe like never before. Why? Because the people of Puerto Rico — humiliated by the destructiveness, lies, deceit, and violation of law committed by the U.S. Navy in Vieques — have demanded the demilitarization of Vieques. No! to the destruction of the fishing industry in Vieques. No, to the destruction of the ocean and shores of Vieques. No, to the destruction of the emotional, psychological, and physical health of our people in Vieques. No, to the continued destruction of the economy of Vieques. No, to the displacement of the people of Vieques from their land, from our land. No, to the forces of destruction that hide behind a facade of a language of deceit, manipulating the pockets, sentiments and lives of our people. The U.S. Navy has made it clear that its primary interest is national security. Whose nation? Who protects our national interests if not us? How dare they speak of protecting democracy while violating our human rights? To this the people of Puerto Rico have cried out, "¡Basta Ya!" The nation has reaffirmed its nationhood; El Grito de Lares lives.

So too have the people spoken through the most recent plebiscite of December 13, 1998. How interesting to study the U.S. media coverage and reactions from the colonizer! And yet to us, the people of Puerto Rico, the dearest statement made

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El Grito De Lares

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as a result of that vote was the rejection of statehood and the reaffirmation of our nationality. We know and express our nationality in all that we do. For over 100 years the U.S. has attempted to destroy and confuse us regarding our identity, and yet to no avail. We have never denied ourselves our nationality; this too is a reaffirmation of our Grito de Lares. Maybe one day the colonizer will be able to understand the meaning of those beautiful words spoken by one of his own founding fathers when Thomas Paine declared, "Those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom must undergo the fatigue of supporting it." Freedom is not the fruit of domination, conquest and colonialism. It is a social and political affirmation of love and respect for human integrity, dignity, and rights. Freedom, not colonialism, makes democracy possible.

The demands for the release of Puerto Rican political prisoners, reaffirmed on August 29, 1999, during one of Puerto Rico's largest mass demonstrations; the persistence and commitment of the entire nation to the demilitarization of Puerto Rican territory together with the cry for the release of the political prisoners; the rejection of statehood during the December 13, 1998 plebiscite vote; and the nationwide demonstrations and general strike against privatization — all testify and bear evidence of an undeniable truth, a truth born on September 23, 1868. We have been and are a nation. One hundred years of U.S. colonial and military rule have been unable to destroy this. U.S. colonial rule needs not fear the political prisoners, or the people of Vieques, or Puerto Rico, What the colonizer fears is that which it discovers about itself, that which is revealed when contradiction is made more evident than the power to conceal the lie.

I don't hate, I teach. I don't destroy. I build. I do not need to bring the colonizer down to raise the glory of my people. What the colonizer fears is himself, not us.

And so today, here locked up in my cell, I extend a warm embrace to all of you — and a smile, because each time we express our nation, I am reminded of just how free I really am. We, the people of Puerto Rico, invite you to celebrate with us El Grito de Lares and anxiously await your solidarity and support with our human right to be free of colonial rule.

God bless all of us. Thank you.

Abrazos,
José Solís Jordán-González
September 23, 1999

Write to Dr. Solís at the following address:

Dr. José Solís Jordán-González
#08121-424
F.C.I. Coleman Low
PO Box 879
Coleman, FL 33521-0879

Thousands Affected By Agent Orange in Dak Lak

HANOI, Aug 25 (AFP)

More than 6,000 people in the central Vietnam province of Dak Lak have suffered from the use of chemical Agent Orange by U.S. forces during the war, a provincial official said on Wednesday.

According to a survey concluded in August, some 2,788 people were directly affected by exposure to the chemical or through foodstuffs sprayed, while more than 3,000 children whose parents were exposed were born with deformities, an official from the provincial department of labor, invalids and social affairs told AFP.

A total 1,031 people died from causes related to the chemical defoliant used by U.S. forces during the war, he added.

The survey was part of a national census of Agent Orange victims launched earlier this year in 55 provinces believed to be suffering from the chemical's effects.

Dak Lak saw some of the fiercest fighting during the Vietnam War, and has a high percentage of accidents from unexploded ordnance.

Hanoi has never officially sought compensation from the Americans for the victims of Agent Orange but the subject was raised when U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visited in 1997.

Recently U.S. researcher Arnold Schecter from the University of Texas worked with Vietnamese colleagues to collect blood samples that could help pinpoint the link between Agent Orange and health problems.

Statement on Vieques

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ing to George Kelly] served in World War II and Korea. Veterans Support Vieques has issued a statement that veterans throughout the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area are signing daily.

As other speakers have pointed out this movement is not anti-American or against our brothers and sisters in the military. We've been there ourselves. We are speaking out because we know this cause is just. We know that President Clinton's plan will only continue the Navy's occupation and destruction against the will of the people of Vieques and all of Puerto Rico. We will give whatever assistance we can to our brothers and sisters on Vieques who are struggling for justice and dignity.

No More Bombs!
Peace For Vieques!
Get The Navy Out Now!
58 Years Is Long Enough!

DAVE CLINE IS CO-COORDINATOR OF THE CLARENCE FITCH CHAPTER (NY/NJ), AND A VVAW NATIONAL COORDINATOR.

Audio Cassettes Of Talks About Vietnam War Wanted

I'd like to get audio cassettes of talks about the Vietnam War and related subjects from VVAW members, so that I can make streaming audio files from them, not only for use in my course on the Vietnam War, but to be made publicly available on the Internet.

The audio quality should be good; anything less will not digitize clearly.

Subjects: the war, your experiences, lessons, related political, cultural, economic, etc., issues.

Please email me directly at <furrg@alpha.montclair.edu>.

And thanks!
Sincerely,
Grover Furr, English Department
Montclair State University
Upper Montclair, NJ 07043

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.

VVAW Membership

PO Box 2067, Station A

Champaign, IL 61825-2067

Membership Application

Name_____

Address _____

City_____ State_____ Zip _____

Phone _____

E-mail address_____

Dates of Service (if applicable) _____

Branch _____

Unit _____

Overseas Duty _____

Dates _____

Military Occupation _____

Rank _____

☐ Yes, add me to the VVAW e-mail list

Membership in VVAW is open to all people who want to build a veterans' movement that fights for peace and justice. Most of our members are veterans of the Vietnam era, but we welcome veterans of all eras, as well as family members and friends to our ranks. The annual membership fee is $20.00 (not required of homeless, unemployed or incarcerated vets).

VVAW is a democratic organization. Chapters decide on local programs and projects under the general guidelines of the national program. Chapters elect local leadership and representatives to annual national meetings where major organizational decisions are made and national coordinators elected. These coordinators are responsible for the day to day organizational leadership of VVAW and issuing national publications.

Signature _____

Date _____

(Make checks payable to VVAW. Contributions are tax-deductible.)

MACV Insignia

US Military Assistance Command (MACV) [official design by the institute of Heraldry, US Army]. Under this insignia 60,000 Americans and 3 million Vietnamese died.

Yellow and red are the Vietnam colors. The red ground alludes to the infiltration and aggression from beyond the embattled yellow "wall" (i.e. The Great Wall of China). The opening in the wall through which this infiltration and aggression flow is blocked by the white sword representing United States military aid and support. The wall is arched and the sword pointed upward in reference to the offensive action pushing the aggression back.

It was first issued to the 12,000 "advisors" in Vietnam in March of 1963.

Insignia of Vietnam Veterans Against the War

We took the MACV patch as our own, replacing the sword with the upside-down rifle with helmet, the international symbol of soldiers killed in action. This was done to expose the lies and hypocrisy of US aggression in Vietnam as well as its cost in human lives. As with all the propaganda put out by the government to justify US intervention in Indochina, the MACV insignia also put forward lies. The US military was not protecting the Vietnamese from invasion from the People's Republic of China, but was instead trying to "save" Vietnam from itself.

Our insignia has come to represent veterans fighting against new "adventures" like the Vietnam War, while at the same time fighting for a decent way of life for veterans and their families.

Our insignia is 30 years old. It belongs to VVAW and no other organization or group may use it for any reason without permission.

Beware of VVAW AI

This notice is to alert you to a handful of individuals calling themselves "Vietnam Veterans Against the War Anti-Imperialist." Though few in number, they are highly mobile and may show up at meetings or demonstrations representing themselves as VVAW.

"VVAW AI" is not a faction, caucus or part of VVAW, Inc. They are not affiliated with us in any way. "VVAW AI" is actually the creation of an obscure ultra-left sect known as the Revolutionary Communist Party and is designed to pimp off VVAW's long history of struggle. Their objective is to create confusion and deception in order to promote themselves.

We urge all people and organizations to beware of this bogus outfit. Don't be fooled. They are not what they claim. **Forewarned is forearmed**!

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.

For more information and to make donations:

- VVAW, PO Box 408594, Chicago , IL 60640
- 773-327-5756
- vvaw@prairienet.org
- http://www.prairienet.org/vvaw/

RECOLLECTIONS

Memories Of Nicaragua, 1986

MICHAEL GILLEN

Ocotal: the name brought back memories last year, and the usual mixed emotions whenever I think or hear of Nicaragua or Vietnam. There's a deep, positive connection, to both those places now (helped by two returns to Vietnam), but the memory of U.S. policy and what it did to them — and those of us who were pawns of that policy — creeps in, and the anger wells back up. In certain ways, the two places go together; memory overlaps and triggers images of one by the other.

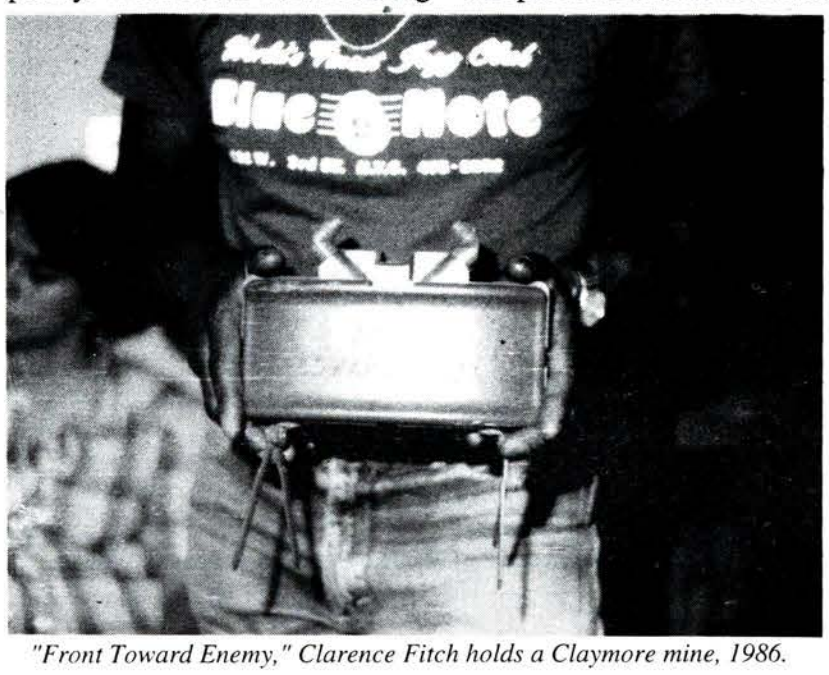
Ocotal: a place where Sandino and his badly-outnumbered followers fought against U.S. Marines, and napalm had an early use in the late 1920s; where the U.S.-funded Contras did their dirty work in the 1980s. The name came up again, as U.S. troops were sent in by "well-intentioned" U.S. policy to help after Nicaragua was hit hard by storms. I was glad U.S. taxpayers' money was going to help Nicaragua, but was it? What else was going on, really, that we didn't know about? What covert plans for the future were being hatched? The suspicions creep — or rush — back in.

Our VVAW delegation, three of us from New York and New Jersey (our now-departed brother Clarence Fitch, and Pahios and myself) and nine from the Midwest (Arm, Branson, Curmano, Davis, Lindquist, Martinez, Ramirez, Spicher, and Terry) toured Nicaragua for a week in 1986. This coincided with the 19th — Patriots Day. But there was little to celebrate as we toured hospitals and rehab centers, seeing firsthand the impact of U.S. policy. Word of the U.S. bombing raid on Libya came in that week too. That news only added to a build-up of emotional pain that soon came out in a variety of ways.

But back to Ocotal. We had made our way from Managua on a loop, to Matagalpa, Jinotega and finally Esteli about 80 kilometers due south of Ocotal. We had picked up shrapnel from contra RPGs that hit a government office in La Pererra, and seen wounded soldiers carried into a field hospital in Jinotega. We were in Esteli when the delegation decided to split up temporarily so Arm and I could take a run up to Ocotal for a look-see. We were all set but word came back that it was too hot with contra activity at the time, so that plan was nixed.

I remember staying in a hotel in Esteli and bumping into a Spanish Civil War/Lincoln Brigade vet one day, Bill Gandell, who was there on a Spanish language study program. Fifty years after his war, he was still learning the language, and true to his beliefs. For many of us, those guys are what heroism and patriotism is all about: something that extends well beyond the field and often has to do with going up against the system.

While in the Esteli area we also toured a civilian hospital that seemed loaded with recent mine blast-related amputees. I remember a small printed sign in Spanish slapped on a wall there that read, in translation, *"Yankees, you'll get what you got in Vietnam if you come down here."* It was as if that message was placed there for us to take back, which we did. And we brought other things back to underscore the point. Like an account of our meeting with the Citizens Committee in Esteli — all kinds of speeches and expressions of solidarity. But one of the things that Memories of Nicaragua, 1986 stuck in my memory the most was looking into an adjoining room and seeing stacks of AK-47s, stocks to floor and barrels joined, ready to go. It was clear the citizenry was well armed and prepared to do as the Vietnamese had done. The monument to Ho Chi Minh in Managua showed the source of some of their inspiration.



"Front Toward Enemy," Clarence Fitch holds a Claymore mine, 1986.

The triggering of memories of Vietnam was unavoidable in Nicaragua. Driving past rice paddies could do it. Or seeing a burned out, mine-destroyed civilian bus. Visiting the wounded could certainly do it. Those things began to take their toll, causing flashbacks and nightmares, and the good feelings and excitement upon arrival took a turn that later I better understood as classic signs of PTSD. I saw it in Clarence Fitch, who earlier was so "up" as he presented a chalice from his community to that orphanage, only to have his mood and spirits changed by the end of that week as the images and memories took their toll.

Clarence had developed his own sense of history, and the knowledge-based context few of us had at 19 or 20 (21 in my case) when shipping out for Vietnam. This had come to him in part from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I'll never forget the moment when, while making our way past fields and villages in northern Nicaragua one day, we heard King delivering that incredible speech when he came out in opposition to the Vietnam War. Clarence had brought a cassette tape along and slipped it to the mini-van driver. And so, as the scene of another potential Vietnam sped by, we heard King's review of how we got involved in the Vietnam War, and about the spiritual lessons, "the true meaning and value of compassion and nonviolence, when it helps us to see the enemy's point of view, to hear his questions, to know of his assessment of ourselves. For from his view we may indeed see the basic weaknesses of our own condition, and if we are mature, we may learn and grow and profit from the wisdom of the brothers who are called the opposition."

Toward the end of the tour it all came together, the memories, lessons, feelings of anger and frustration in the face of the machine, and the need to do what we could to help stem off further misguided policy and bloodshed. We gathered in front of the U.S. embassy in Managua after marching in from the bus chanting, "Reagan, Reagan, he's no good, send him back to Hollywood!" We circled around, and Clarence read the press release he and I had written beforehand explaining our mission and condemning U.S. policy in the region. Then Curmano, Arm and Martinez stuck their fingers with a pin, bent down to touch the ground, and declared, "Let this be the last American blood spilt on Nicaraguan soil."

MIKE GILLEN SERVED IN THE MERCHANT MARINE DURING THE VIETNAM WAR.